Great
Choreographers-Interviews

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Natasha Hassiotis

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Contents

Introduction vii
The Happy Don't Dance x

Pina Bausch (1940-2009) 1
Maurice Béjart (1927-2007) 4
Ushio Amagatsu (1949-) 7
Claude Brumachon (1959-) 12
Norbert Servos (1956-) 17
Trisha Brown (1936-) 22
Alito Alessi (1954-) 28
Helena Waldmann (1962-) 33
Millicent Hodson & Kenneth Archer 38
Wim Vandekeybus (1963-) 44
Charles Linehan 47
Cristina Hoyos (1946-) 51
Thomas Plischke (1975-) & Kattrin Deufert (1973-) 57
Richard Alston (1948-) 61
Xavier Le Roy (1963-) 66
Jérôme Bel (1964-) 70
Juan Kruz de Garaio Esnaola (1966-) & Luc Dunberry (1969-) 75
Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (1976-) 81
Prue Lang (1972-) 85
Carmen De Lavallade (1931-) 88
Sasha Waltz (1963-) 92
Angelin Preljocaj (1957-) 100
Via Katlehong Dance 105
Sonia Baptista (1973-) 109
Emanuel Gat (1969-) 111
Carmen Mota 114
Janet Eilber (1951-) 117
Tory Dobrin (1954-) 124
Heinz Spoerli (1940-) 127

Hofesh Shechter (1975-) 131
Ohad Naharin (1952-) 134
Dominique Boivin (1952-) 138
Koen Augustijnen (1967-) 141
Akram Khan (1974-) 144
Frederic Flamand (1946-) 147
Vera Mantero (1966-) 150
Jonathan Burrows (1960-) 153
Gerda König (1966-) 158
Mark Baldwin 165

Introduction

The interviews which comprise this book cover a time span of twenty years and were published in various newspapers and magazines in Greece and abroad.

The aim, up to a point, is to show the types of dance performances that were hosted in the Greek theatres and festivals during that period, in order to give the reader the chance to become acquainted with representatives of the international contemporary dance scene and to acquire an idea in regard to the preferences of the Greek public as well as the organizers who suggested and invited, one or several times, these particular artists. How much these choices helped—taking into consideration the way the work of these choreographers was presented to the public—to shape or solidify a set of preferences is food for thought for each individual who reads this book, and each person will possibly reminisce about his or her own experience with those artists' shows.

Nonetheless, it may not be relevant to talk about "responsibility" concerning shaping the taste of the public. It is possible that supply and demand in the art world have a different proportional relation from what is valid in the market of other goods. In any event, though, it is useful for a long-term view of the factors that intertwine and influence the production of art, one to contemplate upon which performances one attended, why, what one would want to watch again or would not watch again. I am hoping that spectators become more active and conscious of their decisions and choices.I am hoping that spectators will realize that their time and money are of an important value and that they have the right to choose and accept but also disapprove of works/shows and festivals alike.

It should be noted that the interviews are presented almost unaltered; any slight change that they have undergone only occurred insofar

as to rid from them the dust of time. As journalistic texts intended to cover specific space within the culture section of newspapers and magazines and present important artists in a set number of words, some of them lost right from the start a small amount of information, which was simply cut out. I did not restore the missing material in this publication, because I thought that there was no reason to do that; the aim was to present the interviews in the form in which they were originally presented to the readers. This is the reason I kept the questions and answers that had to do with specific events that these artists' performances related to and, on occasion, of which the interviews were conducted, questions that reveal with precision the time span that has since elapsed. Because it is journalistic text that has a sense of historicity because of its specific time frame, inter alia, I also retained my questions with regard to the then-future plans of the artists. For those initiated into the art of dance, this may be of value: it shows where all these artists are found today. Biographical information has been added in order to facilitate the reader in discerning the genre and style within which the choreographers operate. It should also be noted here that there are artists that cannot be classified as choreographers per se. I did this when artistic directors spoke to me about the founders of historical groups (i.e. Martha Graham) or when artists with important dancing careers behind them took to direct pieces or groups.

Closing this short note, I would like to add that this is obviously not an exhaustive content or chronicle of all performances during 1992–2012. Rather, it is but the fathom of time, the particular position that the newspapers and magazines I worked for had in the market, along with the way I saw my job. Allow me to say that the material in this book constitutes a comprehensive recording of the most important moments in the history of performances of foreign contemporary choreographers in Greece in the past twenty years. Because the thematic axis of this book is precisely the mosaic of foreign visitors to this country, absent from the present volume are the Greek choreographers with whom I conversed from 1992 up to today.

Interviews were not always easy to conduct, and they were often not presented in the desirable extent. Dance, to put it mildly, was not an absolute priority for the press; nonetheless, thanks to certain people, a solution was found at the right moment, while there was understanding in my agony and desire to best present the art of dance. I would like to thank all the good collaborators that I met in these twenty years. I would particularly like to thank my interlocutors for the availability, the talent, and our discussions.

Natasha Hassiotis

The Happy Don't Dance

Given that the human body is vulnerable, mortal, and forgetful, Arnd Wesemann questions its potential to create art.

Lately, yet another study on the findings of the OECD's Work-Life Balance Index has been published, in which so-called happiness researchers evaluate the responses to the survey by inhabitants of OECD's member states on their satisfaction levels with their lives and socio-economic environments: Canada comes well to the fore; Turkey trails behind. What can help people if they are dissatisfied with their communities, their levels of education, their subjective life satisfaction, and their desired work/life balance? Dance? It would appear so. As the political classes begin financially supporting dance, mainly as a means towards self-help or self-remedy, they do so namely to promote their respective countries standing in the four above-mentioned categories. Dance has a lot going for it: it helps to enhance our children's development, to increase trust in our communities, to improve our self-esteem, and even to make us more balanced human beings. And considering that since time immemorial, dance has been at the core of human rituals, it doesn't seem untenable that we could attain that lofty ideal—of a better work/life balance—with the help of ancestral magic.

Yes, that is what one might think . . .

The world's most well-known choreographers, here interviewed by Natasha Hassiotis, come from the United States, Japan, France, Belgium, Germany, England, Argentina, Israel, Switzerland, Italy, and Portugal—countries, it should be noted, that didn't succeed in making it into the upper rankings of a single category in the survey. As such, they all come from glum and gloom-ridden nations. Was it that Natasha Hassiotis simply overlooked the likes of Canadians, Danes, or New Zealanders? We are well aware from hearsay that

choreographers do also practice their art in those countries. It must be the case that the dance world's big art markets, namely Asia and Europe, simply couldn't endure such levels of bliss and harmony generated when the likes of New Zealander Leni Ponifasio took to the stage in his highly original shamanistic-like rituals that would have us reconcile with nature. The same goes for Canadian Édouard Lock, who, together with his ballerinas, practices all sorts of fast dance tempos, just as if their sole rival were the Cirque de Soleil, who, as it happens, are also Canadian-based.

What if we wanted to explain to somebody—someone run-of-the-mill, well balanced, exemplary, integrated, and otherwise content with his or her lot—why he or she ought to understand, approve, and even like dance as a form of theatrical stage show? And not forgetting that this ideal interviewee, whom the OECD has in its sight, would much rather dance himself or herself, if so bidden. This ideal OECD citizen—a person entrenched in bygone standards yet more than delighted to participate fully in the world's endeavours: money, education, cosmopolitanism, emancipation, environmental awareness, appreciation of the arts—would certainly not have the faintest notion about dance. While all the champion nations of the Better Life Balance Initiative steer well clear of dance, the situation on Europe's southern margins or in central Europe is notably different: every Portuguese village boasts of a ballet school; practically every second German municipal theatre prides itself on its dance section. Is dance the conduit for a certain unhappiness? At first glance, one might be tempted to concur with this assumption. In Africa, one observes how the farmhands, following an arduous day's work in the fields, dance at sunset to soothe their aching muscles. After civil wars, it is not uncommon for people to dance on street corners, closely embraced, as though dance itself were the instrument with which to heal their inner wounds. The harder fate strikes, the more determined the body is to fight back . . .

But the happy don't dance.

That also clarifies why, in many instances, dance experiences difficulties in being produced onstage. Opera and drama serve as symbols for commercial and intellectual importance. In marked contrast, dance comes across as a kind of rustic or proletarian pastime—the great classical ballet repertoire being no exception—revolving around nothing more than pubescent desires and the ensuing heartbreaks, as can be witnessed in most dance films produced by Hollywood, in the vein of *Footloose* and *Saturday Night Fever.* Is it possible, then, to develop a substantial art form, as has been the case with the artists interviewed here, from such youthful exuberance? And what would we deduce from that?

Does dance then generate happiness?

Pondering over it certainly doesn't. No other art form generates such intense arguments about its raison d'être and its very right to existence. Forever bandying questions about it in the air, its practitioners constantly attempt to justify themselves. In terms of community, what is the real nature of the relationship of dance—as a form of stagecraft—with its audience? From a work/life balance perspective, what relationship does dance—as a collective undertaking—have to modern-day work methods such as collaboration or improvisation? In educational terms, what relationship has dance to its past, its influences, and its heritage? And finally, in terms of life satisfaction, what relationship has dance to itself and its world? Has it genuinely gained acceptance, and does the applause at the end of a public performance meet its needs?

Dance is for the poor.

With the notable exception of the choreographers herein portrayed, the majority of those working with dance live precariously; this stark reality underscores the absence of an organized professional community, a rather erratic work/life balance, and random income over an extensive and particularly lengthy training period, at whose end most glean but a scant sense of abiding satisfaction.

Hence dance also accurately reflects the trauma that this art form endures from belonging to such a society. Mind you, it is none other than those exceptional choreographers most cherished by the marketplace that often question playfully their relationship to their stagecraft as well as audiences' expectations. They are not in the slightest interested—as distinct from classical ballet and modern dance companies—in producing mere replications of their vintage repertoire. If anything, they dance on that rift that invariably pervades society whenever the "pursuit of happiness" becomes a mere hollow formula, when the body itself goes into defensive mode and physical education is subjected to various norms of civilizing behaviour that reduce it to the perfect material for athletic eagerness to perform in the struggle for sheer political survival.

The body is poor.

Dance serves as a constant reminder of this elementary truth. The human body is vulnerable, mortal, and forgetful. Does it possess the potential to produce art, particularly given that it is neither designed to last an eternity nor is it suitable as a widespread activity? That was another such question.

The sole conceivable solution would be that dance becomes an indispensable criterion in any future OECD happiness survey. To what extent does society funnel its adolescent exuberance into an art form, one which must invariably hold the mirror of a seemingly bodiless society up to itself? To what extent does dance enable the body to partake of happiness? To what extent does society enable its dancers and choreographers to convey such happiness, in which they expose the causes of virtuality and powerlessness? Is not the body and its response the very fundament for the dancing flash mobs—so anonymous and impulsive as they might seem—indeed, for all social movements—so digitalized that they also function—and for every attempt to change the world—so rhetorical that subsequent political decisions owe their genesis to it? Let us simply treat the body's hunger, pugnacity, and aggression seriously. These are dance's

building blocks—not that sense of constant appeasement, of keeping quiet, forbearance, patience . . .

Perhaps you can now hazard a guess as to why dance is an art. And here are its practitioners.

Arnd Wesemann
Dance Journalist
Translated in English by John Barrett

Pina Bausch (1940-2009)

Pina Bausch was born in 1940, in the small town of Solingen, in Germany. A pupil of Kurt Joos (one of the most renowned exponents of Central European modern dance), she started dance at the FolkwangSchule in Essen, and in 1960, having gained a scholarship, she left for the United States to further study at the Julliard School in New York. She then went on to dance with Antony Tudor for two years, and in 1962 she returned to Germany, where she worked as assistant choreographer in the newly founded company of Kurt Jooss, the Folkwang Ballett Company. In 1968, she choreographed her first piece, and a year later, she took over the artistic direction of the group. In 1972, Pina Bausch became artistic director of the Wuppertal Opera Ballet, which would later become Wuppertal Tanztheater. That was when her long and successful choreographic career started, with choreographies and style that would influence artists from the whole spectrum of the arts, also changing dance around the globe. We had our discussion place right before her work titled "Carnations" (Nelken) took place at the Herod's Atticus Theatre in Athens, under difficult conditions, as one of her dancers was injured and had to be replaced, with rehearsal schedule pending.

NH: Often seen in your works are performers acting out a certain lack of communication, loneliness, and even violence, especially among women and men. An example might be Café Muller. Do you think that things for women are as bad today as they used to be?

PB: I would say that Nelken does not revolve around this issue. What I would say in general is that people are turning against themselves. Others do not suffer any harm. On the contrary. And it is true that they are lonely. I suggest that people should see each work as completely separate from others . . . It is true

that there is violence in other works of mine, but it is there for the opposite reasons than one assumes. It is there in order to try to feel what happened to this person, why this person is violent. It is not about violence per se, but it is rather a reference to love, and perhaps the lack of it. It is the exact opposite of what you see! And in regard to the relation between women and men, either of them can be violent, both in my work as well as in reality. Violence is not exclusive to anyone in particular. It can be a trait of anyone, man or woman. After all, my references are generalized; they do not refer to specific persons. Again, it is there without generalizing for all people or creating labels and identities for each sex.

NH: Although there is no narrative in your projects, often the viewer feels that he or she sees a story, or at least has such an illusion . . .

PB: There are many stories. Many! And yes, there is no narrative in the traditional way. And somehow, once people find something in my work, in there, there is their own stories as well. Excerpts of their own stories.

NH: Sometimes, right when I felt I started to follow your story, your so-to-speak "narrative", you changed direction, you changed many directions, as if you had fun playing with the mind of the viewers . . .

PB: Well, I'm a spectator too! I am the spectator, so I don't play "funny", and I do not play games against anyone. I expect that I too have expectations from what will happen onstage. In a project, not everything is given and arranged in an absolutely set manner. All is related to what one sees, but through feeling, through what one feels. There are things that I don't give in an "easy" way ready, but they are there for the viewer to guess, to suspect, to look for them. Why follow a story when there is feeling and sensing? A story is . . . a story. In my works, emotion plays an important role, and each viewer is, in a way, right opposite to it. So you, everyone, should see what happens with this feeling, this emotion, and what will happen to you,

what will happen to the sense of things that you have, and how your feeling will be affected by the show. The public, in a sense, is part of the project. I am not therefore doing anything easily just to achieve a predetermined result, and if anyone thought that I did, then one has misunderstood things . . .

NH: Is there some kind of pessimism in your projects concerning the human condition or gender relationships?

PB: Many tell me that in all my works, they perceive gender relations to be the central focus, and I really start to find that tiring . . . Women and men are first and foremost people. Therefore, my works refer to all. They are about people. The point is to see if we can manage to cooperate, to work together. Such a notion gives hope; it is positive. If someone really tries, if one really feels like trying, then the whole situation takes on a note of optimism. If we can, if we are able to work together. Of course, my works refer to, or rather are, moments of real life. I'm not talking about the prince and fairy tales; I'm talking about real life. My subject matter could be desire, fear, love, or whatever, but it is staged with real or realistic terms. So I would describe them as "optimistic reality". Sometimes things look bad in my works, huh? Well, this is the truth, reality, and when I show it, I may seem pessimistic. Nevertheless, I try to be optimistic and think that things can get better. On the other hand, real life has ugliness too, not all is fantasy and dream. Isn't it so?

NH: You have said that it is easier for you to express yourself in movement rather than in words . . .

PB: People have a special talent in the use of words, of language. Journalists and other writers are using it. They deal a lot with spoken language. They use it in writing, expressing themselves, understand each other through it . . . I just feel that *my* language is different—that it is another language. I can say whatever I want to say. It allows me to say what I *need* to say.

June 1992
(Part of this interview published in *Horos* magazine)

Maurice Béjart (1927-2007)

He was born in Marseille, France, on January 1, 1927, named Maurice Berger, the son of the philosopher Gaston Berger. He discovered dance at the age of fourteen and studied in London and Paris, abandoning his philosophy studies. Since the 1950s, his work stood out as original, and he went on creating almost 140 choreographies. His dance group, the Ballets of the 20th Century, which he founded in 1960 and which later became the Béjart Ballet Lausanne (Switzerland became his new basis in 1985), was legendary. Exuberant and uneven at times in the labyrinth of the impetus of his thoughts, he brought dance to the public in a way that nobody had imagined before: with music that was rarely used in theatrical dance, such as Beethoven or Boulez, and subject matter that spread from the politicized, if not militant, "The Firebird" (1970), at a time of widespread disapproval of dictatorships and disclosed information about tortures of political opponents, to *The Rite of Spring*, *Boléro* (1961), and the ethnic-like pieces Bhakti, Dibouk, and Kabuki. One might say that Béjart sought to connect the function of dance in the world of today with the primeval worship of the cosmic balance as it was mirrored in the form of Shiva as Nataraja, the supreme dancer, creator, and destroyer. Vienna and Saint Petersburg nourished his inspiration, while the music of Manos Hatzidakis and Dionysus—as the embodiment of opposing and yet omnipotent elements—did not leave him unmoved.

To Vima newspaper, 23/11/2007

In his works, there is always tension that hypnotizes the audience. The "magician" that has been staging spectacles which surprise dance lovers in the most unpredictable places is none other than Maurice Béjart: heretic, philosopher, Buddhist, pantheist, provocative. An citizen artist of the world. Restless, although a little calmer with age, he will be coming back to Athens once more. He will bring with

him the choreographed *Ballad of Athinas Street*, the work of Manos Hatzidakis, his friend of more than twenty years. On the telephone, his voice sounded warm and friendly. As he spoke, I understood that only one element was omnipresent to him: dance.

NH: How would you describe your relationship to dance?

MB: I feel I am like a gypsy . . . I am ready to leave at any time to anywhere, without property to keep me from leaving and with dance as my only luggage, the most important companion. I think that this answers your question . . .

NH: The style of your dances has often been described as "dionysiac". What would you say to that?

MB: My dance is often direct, erotic, and this is a natural consequence of my belief that everything is love, from procreation and life to any kind of creation.

NH: Dance has been a marginal art for a long time. How do you see it?

MB: To me, dance is a component of life, component of all the material world, an essential and real element of society in which the artist lives and creates, from which that person gets inspiration and subject matter. Whatever happens there influences and affects the artist. Nonetheless, I would name my dance "cosmic"; it is thus inscribed within a context in which theatricality comes second and life takes precedence.

NH: Is there anything you would change if you could go back in time?

MB: I have no regrets for anything I have done, and as for the mistakes, because I think this is what one refers to when similar questions are asked, I believe that we do not perceive them as such when we make them. It is only later that someone may become fully aware of what happened and learn with them and from them. So I say that if I could start my life from scratch, I would not make the same mistakes, just because that would be very boring!

NH: Do you long for the time when you were dancing yourself?

MB: I do not miss my dancing career at all because choreographing is fulfilling and is what I really wanted to do. You know . . . I danced again in *Notre Faust*, but it was in no way a return to my dancing days, since the part I danced had been simple everyday movement that did not demand any special technical skills.

NH: Do you have any comment to make about dance in Greece since you visit our country often?

MB: I wouldn't say I have . . . I don't know much therefore I could not comment on anything . . .—. I love Greece, and I have visited many wonderful places: Delos, Ithaca, Mount Athos. Greece is also connected to the theatre of Epidaurus, the most amazing theatre in the world.

NH: Is there a specific way in which you choreograph?

MB: There is not one and only way, a unique "recipe . . ." I sometimes start from the music and other times from a storyline. I ask for a new musical score specifically composed for a new work or I resort to a musical collage . . . Everything has to do with the needs of every performance and of my inspiration.

NH: Would you like to say a little on your work on *The Ballad of Athinas Street*, of Manos Hatzidakis, which you are about to present in Athens?

MB: Right . . . This choreography is not a narrative; it is just the feeling from the music and the poetry that directed me while I was working to compose this ballet. For me, there was no reason to create a specific storyline in this choreography when the very words of the poem are heard in their fullness. Moreover, with Manos Hatzidakis, whom I consider a brother, this joint project is not the only link between us. We have one important thing in common: our dedication to art, which is mirrored in our entire beings.

Elle, 1992

Ushio Amagatsu (1949–)

Ushio Amagatsu founded the Sankai Juku group in 1975. Since then, he has performed in over forty countries, introducing Butoh, the dance genre that developed in Japan in the 1950s, to thousands of viewers. Predominantly through the pioneering works of Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, Butoh opposed the levelling and homogenization of Japanese art from the foreign elements that flooded the country after the war. To this day, this genre continues to catch the imaginations of audiences and artists around the globe, while the stance of the younger generation of Butoh exponents gives the opportunity for new discussions about the style and characteristics of the art of dance in Japan today.

NH: What would you say are the genres that inspire Butoh and the group Sankai Juku particular?

UA: I can only give a general idea . . . In it, all the dancers are Japanese. This is very important because physically, for example, there is very little difference between them, meaning that they have a lot in common between them than in comparison to other people. I say this because I personally think that the body is civilization and culture. Then the relationship between Butoh and Noh and Kabuki is not one that is related to the technique that is used. Not at all. This, of course, is my opinion . . . To give you another example, yesterday you saw that all the dancers had their bodies painted white. This process comes from Noh or Kabuki, but it was used in the dance before those two were created. Therefore, it is only in this sense that one can say that Butoh is related to these types of theatrical performance. Now, why shave our heads . . . ?

NH: I would come to this anyway . . .

UA: We can distinguish a person from the style of his or her hair or make-up—where the person belongs, who the person is in a sense, because by choosing clothes, hairstyle, and make-up, an individual acquires a particular identity, a certain profile, and this we want to overcome. So before we start to dance, we want to move away from the feeling of everyday life, and it is in this sense that we do it. The same with painting our bodies white. Dance is combined with Noh and Kabuki at exactly this point—that first and foremost, a dancer must move away from everyday life. Then something totally new is created.

NH: Continuing what you just said and referring to theatricality, I would like to ask about the clothes: Does the fact that you wear dresses, which, in Western culture at least, are considered female clothing, have to do with the theatrical tradition of your country, where, for example, all Kabuki roles are interpreted by men?

UA: There is no connection with Kabuki, but when I wear a skirt, for example, I can play both the man and the woman. So I'm neither one nor the other. I continuously shift roles.

NH: There are many women artists of Butoh for example Yoko Ashikawa—and more, but your group is an all-male company; how did you decide to have an exclusively male company?

UA: First of all, I would like to emphasize the fact that I have the experience of cooperation with female dancers and set designers, and moreover I have choreographed for women, especially for women. As for Sankai Juku, at first, the composition of the group was random, and now I do not want to change it. Outside Sankai Juku, I find it interesting to choreograph for women because their dance is more "subtle" than that of men. I am very interested in these qualities.

NH: Many times in Butoh performances, we see intense expressions on the faces of the dancers. Also, references often are made to "human drama", an issue that is discussed by [Ankoku] Butoh. What is your opinion? That is, is there a specific

sign code behind the expressions on the faces and expressive "deformations" in the body shapes of the dancers?

UA: My aim is not to choreograph pessimistic works, and I would like to stress this. As we all know, an individual has many different emotions. An individual does not only feel remorse, for example, but also anxiety and much more. The viewer sees the face of the dancer and sees only one feeling. But when you see a person, you can understand exactly what is happening or what he or she wants to say. However, this does not matter, and when the dancer turns his or her back, then the viewer can imagine another feeling. Therefore, it is neither the one specific expression of any dancer when we see that person's face, nor the expression in a particular moment, that is of importance, but throughout the performance that matters, as the context changes. Then it is complete . . . Comparing myself to other choreographers, I think that the particular expressions of our faces in Sankai Juku are very "subtle", not that intense; therefore, the viewer must be more attentive in order to see the changes made, the differences, the transitions.

NH: In terms of content, what topics do you choose? In addition to that, would you like to say a few words about the importance, if they have any, of issues such as life, death, birth, et cetera in your own thinking? Have you distanced yourself from anything that could be considered a "traditional" Butoh stance in regard to subject matter?

UA: In my opinion, these issues concern us, and there are no big differences between peoples as far as these issues are concerned, regardless of the individual differences of each cultural context. When I am directing my dances, I always think, "What is man? What are his feelings? What does a man do?"

NH: Let's get on to the music that you use and how important it is for your creation.

UA: Music, for me, is not just accompaniment of dance, and this applies to all things: props, lighting . . . They are independent sectors, and they all come together at the performance. It is

then that theatrical space is created. I have collaborated with the same musician for twenty years. Usually, and this applies to music, the composer comes to the rehearsals to see the "space", to get a general idea, and then he or she composes the music. I choreograph. I talk about my work to the composer without his or her seeing the choreography, and the day of the show, these two, music and dance, meet. Normally everything is done separately, except for the parts that are done at a quicker pace, and about which I discuss with the composer exactly how I want the music.

NH: The dancers show awesome precision and plasticity. They sometimes give the impression that their bodies have the potential to spread in an illimitable way . . . Nevertheless, they do not attempt acrobatic moves. Ultimately, how do you see and treat the body? In ballet, for example, education is painful and harsh. Are there any common ideological points with your training?

UA: I am very happy that you ask me this question; I find it very interesting. There are two factors that help an individual to move: relaxation and tension. Western dances start from tension. Etymologically, the word *dance* comes from *tension*. Tension in human life starts from the moment the child manages to stand. Then tension is created—when the body can make steps. Until then, the body uses another modus for its movement. The body of the baby, while in its mother's womb, is floating. Movement starts there. After birth, the first move is relaxation. The child lies down. This is the beginning of relaxation. While growing, the individual needs to definately relax once daily. This is a basic movement. Later on, the infant sits and can then get up and walk. He or she can stand. In this process, contact with the ground is reduced, with each movement containing tension and relaxation. I think this process is like speech. One needs to relax; he or she cannot talk endlessly. Therefore, from birth, relaxation is important. This is the most important element.

Dance originates from relaxation rather than from tension, so my choreography can't be "cut"; it has continuity, flow. When I jump, my contact with the earth is cut, but we need to have some contact to avoid "cutting", interrupting the dance. Therefore, the shape of intensity must be interrupted. When I jump, for example, I must relax right after that. Conversely, when it comes to relaxation, movement can continue for as long as I want. This is a big difference between the Western dance and mine. Let's take this movement [he shows me the fifth arm position of classical ballet]. This movement is upward. This is its tendency. In this very position, I am not interested in the top or bottom, only in how and why I shall get from one point to another.

NH: Finally, does the denomination «Butoh» cover what you do?

UA: We often use the word Butoh, and in the Japanese language, the word Butoh is ideal for us, the Sankai Juku group. Nevertheless, each choreographer uses this word from his or her own viewpoint. As for the themes, I wanted to clarify something: you talked about traditional issues, life and death. These are basic facts for all people. They are not issues that specifically occur in the Japanese dance. They are of great concern to all people. They are facts—how can I say it?—that are unique! We can't change them. It is in this regard that I think of them. Personally, I believe that my dancing is on the side of life and not on the side of death, and that moreover, it expresses the joy of life, the protection of life.

Fall 1992 (abridged version published in Horos *magazine)*

Claude Brumachon (1959-)

Claude Brumachon and Benjamin Lamarche, his collaborator since 1981, are head of the Centre Choregraphique Nationale of Nantes. Brumachon, coming from the visual arts, started taking dance lessons with Catherine Atlani, while Lamarche had collaborated with great names of the French dance scene, such as Karine Saporta, Philippe Découflé, and Daniel Larrieu. Their first group was founded in 1984 and was called Rixes. Claude Brumachon has choreographed more than seventy works and since 1992 had directed the Choreographical Centre of Nantes, with Benjamin Lamarche as his co-manager as of 1996. They visited Greece for seminars and performances.

NH: Seeing your class and your choreographies, I would like to ask you what it is that you require from your dancers.

CB: First of all, an impeccable technique. Then their ability in improvisation, something that is easy for some and very hard for others.

BL: It is a total investment on a physical as well as on a psychological level.

NH: How do you work? Do you, for example, go to the studio with a concrete idea or already devised steps—or is it something else?

CB: It depends. There are days in which I go to the studio with everything written and ready in advance, but the opposite also occurs a lot. There is no such thing as a "system". I don't have any system with regard to composition. Each work is different. *Folie* [1989] was worked differently from *Les Avalanches* [1995] and *Lame de fond* [1992]. Each work needs a different approach, and there are all these elements that the personality of each

dancer may bring, plus whatever may happen in there and then in rehearsals . . .

NH: Do you do any research before each work? At least, this is what you declared back in 1986, when you were concerned with the Samurais.

CB: Yes, although there are many differences from then! I am more mature . . . I work on a philosophical level instead of simply primary materials. I was younger, though, back then, and I had just begun to choreograph and I was experimenting with various things. I am now interested in the atmosphere of things.

NH: Are you interested in people understanding your work?

CB: I want them to feel them! Nothing else.

NH: You sometimes said in the past, "Appearance is important." Do you still believe this, and how would you say that such a principle is transcribed in your work?

CB: In this phrase, you can see my studies and experience from the School of Fine Arts. In my work, though, a permanent and equal communication exists between dance and painting. I talk a lot to my dancers about atmosphere, ambience, an inner feeling, and emotion. In a movement, we always *feel* something specific, and I want them to *become* this "something".

BL: Not to "resemble" but for the dancer to *become* this feeling.

NH: I cannot resist asking you which subject matter you prefer: distress, love, poverty, today's world with its problems . . .

CB: What interests me is people, the individuals with all their contradictions and complexities. I don't particularly prefer a specific era. Besides, history teaches us that events are repeated, not in an identical form, but there are analogies and similarities. There are also differences. As an example, in the clothes and attitudes . . . There are big differences, but the way, for example, that often countries go to war aggressively and all of that are repeated in the same way, although relations function in a

different environment and a different era—of course. Then we continue thinking that Africa, for example, is far away, but in reality, resemblances that actually exist in different parts of the world are enormous: we find something in Africa that also exists in Vietnam, in Chile, and so on. When somebody puts the dancers together, he or she discovers a universal language in the readability of which all have access. There exists this direct comprehension between the dancers because the body, despite social barriers, constitutes an incredibly powerful means of understanding.

NH: If I understand well, you have a multinational company, yes?

CB: Yes. From Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Russia, Spain, England, Nigeria.

NH: I agree to the above said, but do you really think that you could rid yourself of the Western way of thought and really approach other cultural codes?

CB: I want to try to understand them, but I also believe that the Western way of thought has a lot to give. It is important to "mix" well the various "strands" in order to understand more things better.

NH: Which music do you prefer in your work?

CB: Just about everything. Especially in the studio, at the stage of inspiration, I use everything! From techno up to . . . anything. However, this is not something that is done by chance. It always has something to do with the subject matter, while we are trying to direct ourselves to the right movement "vocabulary". I always say to myself, "Think why you select this particular music score and not another—why this music seems to be the right one for this particular subject . . ." There is a musician that composes music specifically for each performance.

NH: Choreographers usually avoid putting their creative experience in words. However, you seem to disagree with this . . .

CB: I know what I see and what I want, without the least sense of voluntarism in this "I want". I know, for example, that in

"Folie", I wanted to give an expression of pain and lyricism. I can also, and this is improved with age and maturity, guide a dancer to the emotion that I want to emerge from the movement that I search. The dancer in turn is not there by chance; he knows the reason why and tries as well. So finally, the difficult thing is to find the right movement, the one that corresponds to the situation or to the emotion that I want to express at that time. This is complicated. Now of course, why and if the outcome is correct for *that* particular sentiment is an even more complicated matter! I often hear people talk about the creative process and describe it as "magic", or say things like "I mixed all, and it all came out . . ." However, I don't work like this.

NH: So after you have finished, you re-examine your work to find the "correct" and "incorrect" for each emotion movement, re-evaluating what you have done so far?

CB: Precisely!

NH: Almost . . . psychoanalytical.

CB: I adore psychoanalysis. I think that one matures and passes in another dimension through this process. Besides, there are also movements that are unconscious . . . With me, the dancers don't just dance in chance.

BL: I would say that in all of us exists a "cut", a lack. We dance in order to "meet again" with this lack.

NH: There is passion in your works. Would you say that you are a passionate person?

CB: Absolutely! What else I can say . . .

NH: What are your influences?

CB: Painting, a lot, which of course refers to my father, who was a painter. In the morning, he worked in the factory, and in the evening, he painted. He had this as a means of existence and expression, while I finally chose dance. Then Catherine Atlani

in Rouen, because she constantly insisted on improvisation, and I was thus free to follow my own path.

NH: You have a quite unique movement vocabulary, and you cannot be easily "classified"—supposing that something like this would be necessary.

CB: I have been building it patiently like an ant for fifteen years. In the beginning, my way was more anarchic. It is now more structured. I don't usually transcribe movement as I see it around me. I simply feel things that later on pop up before or during the creative process.

NH: Is it necessary for choreographers and their dancers to have close relationships in order for the first to communicate their inspirations to the latter?—

CB: Yes. My dancers are very close to me; they have been with me for many years, and we have things coming up, new things, constantly. And I saw this clearly during an improvisation on clochards. And you know, it takes very long until the ice is broken and a relationship is built . . .

NH: What is needed then in order to succeed in this?

CB: Patience! Immense patience. There are no miracles. It's all about patience and time . . .

E.CH.: Until the walls between us are fallen . . .

CB: Precisely!

En Choro magazine, spring 1996

Norbert Servos (1956-)

Norbert Servos is a leading scholar on Tanztheater (dance theatre), a genre that has influenced many choreographers on both sides of the Atlantic. Critic, writer, and choreographer in recent years, artistic director of Tanz-labor in Berlin (associated with the Academy of Arts of the city), along with Tatiana Orlob finds his work in this partnership very interesting. In the last two years, they organized their own festival, with the non-coincidental title «a/skin», which can also be read as *asking*-.

NH: What was the rationale behind choosing this title?

NS: We picked it because our main goal is to ask questions rather than to give answers. Another part of creating this project was helping young choreographers and breaking the rules of competition. The requirement of the festival is to remain together in the evening and discuss our projects, something that led many of us to change elements in our works, by adding, removing, altering, et cetera. I wish we had some financial support!

NH: I guess funding is difficult . . .

NS: To understand the extent of the problem, we do not know what will happen this year. From Berlin, they don't give us any money, so we are looking for a sponsor. Grants are given to three group for three years, and only after the end of this three—year period may new groups apply. This, of course, creates many problems. There are groups on the top of the list of grants for fifteen years, and nobody else gets a chance for funding. However, recently there have been discussions in favour of changing the law.

NH: Let's move on to something else. How did you decide to become a critic?

NS: I did not *decide* it! I fell in love with dance when I saw Pina Bausch. I thought that Pina was like a rare island in the sea of classical dance. The ballet annoyed me in term of aesthetics as well as narrative, and at some point twenty years ago, four people, among them myself, felt the need to speak differently about dance and change the debate on classic ballet, so we started a magazine titled «*Ballet International*». Our initiative changed things concerning the way the younger generation thinks about dance. On top of everything, we also had to write the texts ourselves. J. Schmidt and H. Koegler, already well-established critics, helped us. However, I prefer not be called a critic but "someone who likes dance". What I do is to search for words to unite the public with the choreographers. My job is communication. It doesn't matter what I like or not; only the reasons I have to write matter . . . about a certain thing.

NH: What do you mean?

NS: I mean that whether I like something or not, I should fully justify my opinion but also describe the event. However, what concerns me now is a pseudoscientific view that has begun to emerge and the positivism that is about to prevail. A choreography must be observed and analysed on many levels. Dancing is not only movement material. Significant choreographies have spirituality and insight. As smart as the choreographer is, equally smart should be the critic. Then he or she needs to be informed continuously and furthermore to know that in art there is no good or evil. There is no morality. This is stupid!

NH: You are opposed to certain kinds of analyses or to the use of certain scientific tools that may assist criticism?

NS: What I'm saying is that you can analyse choreography, but you must be careful when, for example, you have studied psychology or sociology, to not attempt to put what you know into what you see. When analysing, you separate the data, but

then you have to bring them back together as they were in the performance, where everything is perfectly balanced. I am careful now with all of that. Then science is anatomy. It fits the Western tradition but can end up like those who start to repair a car and eventually find themselves left with thousands of screws and not a clue what to do with them. It takes intuition to see how a choreography works and a strong mind, of course, in the sense of knowledge of history, art, et cetera. I say to follow the choreography and don't think. Ideological debate kills the dance. It is like rape on the body of the dancer. The body was not made for ideals . . . Not everything may be resolved with the use of words. If you see dancers and choreographers, you will notice how they communicate through body language. Body language does not lie, but then again, there are very good actors in everyday life . . . Personally, I would never go as far as considering the body as *the* source. I would thus burden it with an ideology, a process to which I oppose, as I said before. I would just say that body language has its own lies.

NH: And the audience?

NS: I think part of the audience has trouble recognizing the tactics of modern dance, but if one expects narrative structures of the past, he or she is clearly on the wrong track. These are for children. They are done, finished.

NH: What common elements do you find in great choreographers, if any.

NS: They are different from each other, but they all show us where the barriers are, the inhibitors, or they open a small door to freedom. Small movements in Bausch or recurrent in Kaersmeker show that the body wants to escape, to move, to encounter the primary source of life. Realism is to show the limitations that exist. With illusions, such as we find in ballet, for example, and which still exist, people are satisfied. but it is like fooling the audience.

NH: But what about all this knowledge that exists?

NS: I'm not saying to throw away knowledge which was acquired in the course of, say, three hundred years, but I say no to the aesthetics of ballet. If I see a good ballet performance, I may even like it, but after a while, I shall pay attention to the dancer and no to *Swan Lake*, which says nothing about today's world.

NH: How do you like dancing nowadays—and how do you imagine the dance of the future?

NS: I don't know. I move on. I do not predict. I observe, I see, I help. The fact is that borders open. There is freedom to explore things in many ways, from Butoh to dance theatre, and there is Forsythe, Mats Ek . . . There are thousands of things like there were never before. We are finally open on issues concerning national dances, their deeper meaning.

NH: You feel optimistic, then?

NS: This stems from my experience. I see performances that make me feel happy. The financial situation, though, is difficult in Europe; nonetheless, nothing can kill this art because it is based on human nature. I believe that a social structure that is capable of incorporating movement is very humane, very positive. This does not exist in the West. On the other hand, totalitarianism uses the body as well, but not in the way I referred to earlier on—it imprisons it. Such regimes love the soldiers because they can't move. In Germany, the Nazis "moved" large masses precisely because people feared freedom. People sought safety and unfortunatelyfound it to military discipline! From the beginning, the tradition of modernism used the body as an autonomous entity, while in parallel it made a political statement. Today we are still investigating this tradition. The bodies do not tolerate hierarchies. They are anarchic because there is no hierarchy in movement, there is no movement that is more or less important, and I am not referring to the techniques that can be organically taught. There is something in the body that wants to be alive, but often what is positive for life is banned as dangerous, as happens in any dictatorship.

NH: You combine many different identities. How easy is it?

NS: Often people say to me, "You write poems, reviews, et cetera. How come? My response is that everything comes from the same source: poetry. When I write, I use a language that I hope to be close to dance.

NH: What topics do you tackle in your choreography?

NS: My biggest issue, as far as I know, is love. Opening up and distancing. I view love as an energy that unites us. I don't examine differences, relations between the sexes. I am interested in what happens when we meet. We somehow change from our contact with others; conflicts are created within us from all the new elements we get to know.

NH: Since this is your main issue, you must have something to tell us about this "energy that unites us".

NS: When you search for it, it disappears. When you don't, it comes. In choreography, you have to open up so that the other may get into the circle. Then communication may start. Then passion can begin. It is *when* exactly it starts that I care to find out. At the end of a project, you are alone but never lonely.

Avghi newspaper, 1996

Trisha Brown (1936-)

Trisha Brown was born in Washington and studied with Louis Horst, mentor and collaborator of Martha Graham, at the AMERICAN DANCE FESTIVAL at Connecticut College. However, her dancing and choreographic career began in New York in the 1960s. A member of Judson Dance Theater (1962) and later the Grand Union (1970-1976), she was one of the pioneers of American modern dance, along with Steve Paxton, Twyla Tharp, Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer, and David Gordon. Her choreographic process and the friendly to the body release technique that she uses have influenced many choreographers worldwide. Trisha Brown, a legendary figure of postmodern dance, is also an artist who explored alternative and unconventional venues where dance performances may be hosted, as well as the integration of everyday movement in dance, except for a dance technique.

NH: How would you describe the point where you are artistically and choreographically today?

TB: Where am I today? I've gone freestyle, I would say . . . Well, I just got out my solo titled *If You Couldn't See Me* and started to slide towards Johann Sebastian Bach and the great composer called Claudio Monterverdi, so I am pleased to inform you that I do not know where I shall go next.

NH: What feeling do you get from that? Is it a feeling of freedom?

TB: It's interesting, because it have always had this feeling. After each project, I was gathering the material that happened to interest me and I just followed from that point onwards the dance, the movement, and then I was investigating various aspects of what I would do. For example, with Monteverdi, I read the libretto, the myth [*Orpheus*], and the musical score at the same time that I had my own dance education and my past.

Therefore, I felt then that I have around me dozens of shelves with material from which I can get different stuff, and this ultimately works very well. My vocabulary naturally changes to meet the needs of an operatic project, but also to meet the needs of the characters, emotions, and music. What is basically needed, and that *I do* in this case, is negotiation: between myself and what I am carrying within me, as well as with the work that I have undertaken to choreograph. I have a great responsibility to the public and the opera. Giving and taking; this is what always happens. My job has certainly become less abstract because of the work, which is an opera, and I must say that I wonder how my collaboration will be with the singers in September when I meet them in Brussels. I wonder if I have gone too far with gestures or if I am on the right track . . .

NH: How would you describe the way you work with your dancers?

TB: I would say that the way I used to work is different from the way I work today. In any case, I take from my dancers; I get inspired by them . . .

NH: Do you talk to them? Do you ask questions . . .

TB: I know what I want to do, and I begin. I find something, and I say, "This is it." I start to work with the dancers, and when we sometimes reach a dead-end, then we try different things:I give them some directions, they show me material, and . . . we continue more or less in this way.

NH: What is the relation of movement to music and speech in your work?

TB: I think that the relation between music and movement has not been explored enough. We use it a lot, but do we really know it? And when we realize this "problem", then what do we do? We sort of sit down and write a report on this issue, or we "discuss" with music in order to develop a real sensibility in relation to it? Also, how does one work in silence? this is another important issue. Speaking for myself, I have to say that even when there is music, what I see is a dance evolving in

silence, after which music was added. Music *colours* what I see, and I play with this in my choreographies. I think that silence makes dance more dramatic. It adds to the drama. The moment of silence is a dramatic moment.

NH: And the reason for that?

TB: I have worked with speech, especially in the *Accumulations* series. I often had a completely set text, while I sometimes improvised as the piece developed. I can't say that this is completely different from the work I did with the libretto of the opera. In *Orpheus*, the text is so closely connected with the music that I almost can't separate them, although I try to see them separately in order to give each element the space it needs.

NH: Does it give you a distinct sense to also "address" the audience verbally?

TB: The thing about speech is that everybody speaks a language, so they listen better than they see. On the other hand, there are not many who are "literate" in movement vocabulary, so they direct themselves to the auditory part for safety . . .

NH: Doris Humphrey said that there are things that dance can tell, and others that it cannot. Which are the limitations and what is the power of dance, in your opinion?

TB: *I* would say that there are things one can say with rhythm and others that cannot be said using the movement vocabulary, the "language" that was developed following the primal body movement. There are so many emotions that dance can express, and we must trust the feelings and the power they have. I admire her, but I am rather on the opposite side concerning what dance is and how it can work.

NH: What would you say is the biggest disappointment or frustration for your generation?

TB: I got the newspaper earlier on, and I read that they are cutting money from the budget—money for children with special needs, education, and health care, but also for the arts. I am proud of dance. It is a stunning, magnificent art form

that works on all levels of human existence, and my biggest disappointment, yes, is to hear uneducated government officials speak lightly and pompously as they announce measures that condemn dance to only survive as an art for some elite class. I detest their sickening comments about this art that, for me, is sacred. This is the biggest disappointment of my career so far. Perhaps, despite the money cut, anybody who is interested may find a solution. But the fact that they make art a scapegoat and enemy, that they present it as the source of the problems, this is unbelievable!

NH: We talked about frustration; let's now discuss the greatest achievement of your generation.

TB: My generation introduced many different kinds of modern dance—dance for the camera, alternative spaces, and more. I personally sometimes feel that I spent my life in industrial environments and generally in spaces that too many deem "inappropriate", "dirty", and so on—spaces like deserted train stations, for instance. In the wake of the industrial revolution, and with technology progressing with leaps and bounds, I wanted to communicate, to share my thoughts on all of that in different city areas that expressed all that in some way. My generation created a dance—call it as you like: postmodern, contemporary . . . anything—in which we basically took a step back, took a breath, and stopped dancing for a while in order to renegotiate what was going on onstage and to add new perspectives to dance.

NH: What do you consider the most important moments in your career so far?

TB: I would say that I probably work in cycles. In my twenties, I was a baby just opening my eyes. Then it was like I grew up a little and went to school and so on, and each time I added things like tours and different projects, which always were in agreement with my body, this specific body, if and how to proceed. Though modern dance in America presents an indissoluble, so to speak, unity, there is also great diversity, and

what I feel happy about is that I managed to survive by doing my own style and largely on my own terms. Because even though the government reduces funding or directs funding to mainstream options, there are fortunately some safeguards in the system for different genres.

NH: What did you aspire to accomplish when you started working professionally with dance?

TB: When I started out, my professional choices were either education or medicine. I was independent and strong, but I had no guarantee where would lead me the risky choice I finally made to make dance my profession. I did not start with a specific agenda; it was created along the way. As long as I was a dancer in that era, things were different from now, but what I already knew was that I didn't want to be told what to do. Nonetheless, I can say that I had no idea that I would become a choreographer. I hadn't thought of that or planned it from the beginning. I hadn't had the slightest idea! This came up more or less at the age of twenty-nine. I was already doing little things, at the Judson, for example. I don't know how to explain it: I had come from the West Coast to New York to study, to dance, and to gather as much experience as possible. Then there came a time, close to my thirties, when I said, "I want to do *this* thing, and this alone!" And if I did it, I had to do it seriously so that people could see it, have access to it. I had to organize it. So I began to think how all this could be done.

NH: What do you miss most from those years?

TB: People in the arts in the 1960s didn't know they would become rich. Painters and sculptors made art because they "ought" to do this—and nothing else. They did not do it for that . . . Artists created and talked about their art and art in general. There was a big discussion about art, and exchange and a creative mood . . . and if, for example, I showed something and then I was thinking of doing another thing, and someone else happened to do what I had thought to do myself, I would not lose time at all to sit down and do *that* same thing, but I would

move on to the next step. Nobody was afraid of failure; it was all part of the process. We also had a small audience . . . I was in the studio, in silence, and I was working there alone. That was the right thing to do, and it was great. I was keeping notes of things I was doing . . .

NH: Your generation changed dance. How do you feel about it?

TB: Yes, indeed . . . To tell you the truth, I'm disconnected from this picture. But you know, sometimes I see that respect for my work and a positive perception of my work exist in places where I haven't given any performances and people haven't seen my work, and that makes me wonder . . . If they see my work and still have this positive view, then I shall fully respect their judgment. Anyway, there may be an opinion about me out there somewhere, and I know it exists, but I don't function on this basis because that would impede my work as well as my everyday life. They could even interfere with who I am and how I behave.

NH: What might dance look like in the future? What do you think?

TB: I think that it will be more "loose" and less structured, because nowadays composition is taught much less than before. I don't know . . . I can't imagine if dance will develop towards a more formalistic or theatrical direction . . . Generations who came after us were never taught composition the way my generation was. So things are fluid. Who knows what will come tomorrow . . . Those of us who influence the scene one way or another have some degree of responsibility for any "stream" created by us and can exert some influence, such as the relation between music and dance with music, for example.

NH: Is there anything you would like to comment upon before we close?

TB: Yes, I would like to emphasize again the theme concerning the support of the government to the arts and the state in which art is found today. We must insist that the situation change.

July 1997 (unpublished)

Alito Alessi (1954-)

Alito Alessi is a dancer and choreographer whose work is based on contact improvisation. Emery Blackwell is his main partner in the organization and development of the project he started in 1987, called Danceability. The only peculiarity is that Emery suffers from cerebral palsy, which means problems in speech and movement. They, along with the rest of the group, came to Greece after being invited to teach seminars and to perform as well.

NH: Let's start by asking you how you work and why contact improvisation was deemed appropriate for the goals you have set in relation to the mobility of the bodies of those involved in Danceability. What is this project and what is its aims?

AA: It's easier to understand improvisation if we talk about jazz music. It works in a similar way in the context of movement. When to the process of improvisation «contact» is added, then it refers clearly to the physicality, which is the theatrical element of physical contact, and to the dynamics that people externalize when touched. This form of dance was developed in the early seventies by Steve Paxton, my teacher for many years, and it aims at enhancing the capacity to create images of interest. Solo improvisers can produce images associated with the dynamics of their own bodies. This changes in teamwork, as different qualities interfere, caused by the relationships of the bodies, which express themselves through movement. Furthermore, it helps one to work with the physical dynamics of the weight and gravity on the body, not just for the dancer to use his or her own muscle strength. It is not anymore about lifting one's partner as in ballet, but to find a midpoint balance as well as the acceptance of the effort of the two bodies in what they have to do and what they are about to do.

NH: What is dance for you?

AA: For me, it's a matter of communication. For the solo performer, it means to listen and gain experience of his or her body. That is, how the body will be able to experience feelings and emotions on a deeper level and not just simply to record thoughts, which only characterizes a primary intellectual state. Therefore, in the solo creation, it concerns the communication with oneself. When working in a group dance, it refers to the ability to communicate on a non-verbal level with other people. I know that speech has infiltrated the arts of the body, as, for example, in dance theatre, performances, et cetera, and that many contemporary artists use it. Diversity is great; it is just that my own direction remains non-verbal. I prefer it that way.

NH: What are the aesthetics of your work?

AA: My own views differ significantly from what one would call "average". My understanding is that art is born from the integration of the whole of one's personal experience, which awakens the intuitive ability of the body. Intuition generates movement in the body. For me, the beauty of movement is to be found in this relationship, which essentially leads you and guides you to create. Not on how nice of shapes and formations I can make, or how high I lift my leg, but how closely I remain connected to the experience of my movement.

NH: I don't think that you renounce technique. During the seminar, your movement showed deep attention and education.

AA: These are part of the movement ability I have, but it's not necessarily useful to look just like a beautiful dancer. I have studied and I can do all of that, but the deepest aspect of my education is that I don't just execute the steps; I actually experience any set of steps/movements when I execute them. I consciously remain very attentive to the sense of movement. I don't just create it. Furthermore, I know that when the body is truly connected to its experience, then the public has a much more kinaesthetic awareness of what is happening.

NH: How do you arrive to dance what you name your intuition, and how do you know that what emerges is really what you call your intuition?

AA: First, whether my performance will be seen as "dance" depends on who sees me. It may not be considered as such by someone who has a very limited understanding of what dance is. To answer the second question, I can tell you that in improvisation one may end up with thousands of different movements, but there is one that can lead to what we might call a "moment of truth" of this movement. The way, because there is a way to wake within yourself the intuitive ability, does not come in an apocalyptic way, but you recall it, in the same way that you open your eyes to see or your mouth to eat. You can train yourself to know, to recognize the sense of your intuition.

NH: Your group has existed since 1979. How did you decide at some point to get involved with what you call Danceability?

AA: I was a choreographer-improviser, meaning that my movement was born from improvisation. It was therefore through this process that I first realized that I had many restrictions in my movement. With time, I had acquired habits and patterns in my body, in a way that I ultimately felt I was no longer improvising. So I started wondering how I could learn to move differently. I so happened, right at that time, to read an article about a group of people in England who moved together with individuals with disabilities. So I thought that if I could move with people who have different bodies than mine, then maybe that would be the solution I was looking for. It was an experiment that worked; it refreshed my whole perception of the immediacy of sensation and movement.

NH: How many people are in your group?

AA: Eight at the moment, of which five are disabled.

NH: How willing were these five partners to trust you?

AA: In the beginning, there was great resistance, even from Emery, who had to be pushed a lot by his friends to come and join us.

NH: What training did Emery, a key partner of yours, need to acquire?

AA: When he first came, he did a seminar like everybody else. Then we started to go to the studio two or three times a week and started to work with the practice called contact improvisation, done with eyes closed, directing our attention to the experience of the personal sense of motion. This was the warm-up. We did this in order to open ourselves up to each other, to learn and understand our movement patterns, and that was done for months before we even started to believe that we would do something together.

NH: What do you think needs to be added to the education of disabled people in order for them to more appreciate their mobility?

AA: The problem is not so much in them but in the system, which constantly subjects them to the idea of disability, of limited participation and activity. Sidewalks, buildings . . . everything harbours this idea. It's more a matter of a "disabled" society rather than one of specific individuals.

NH: What emotions did you have to overcome when you started this project, both in the community and in your group?

AA: I have prejudices like everyone else. People with disabilities also have prejudices, even towards each other. Therefore prejudice is everybody's issue and concern. However, in my case, there was a certain difference—that this work at some point became like a continuation of perceptions and attitudes I grew up with, because I did have the experience of two disabled people, my mother and my sister. Nevertheless, I still had to practically "deepen" my attention. To look and see the possibilities that really existed to build material through what was feasible. For example, when someone does not have legs, that person can't do anything that requires standing up. Also, if someone is blind, you just don't teach something where the most important element is visual perception; you use touch. What I did was observe in order to discern the greatest common denominator

in the motor ability of all the members of the group. I isolated these items, and then I taught . . . This freed me, took me to the essential, because in addition, I think what is needed is expressive austerity. Where there is great drama, the self is missing; the essence of things is missing. This doesn't mean that I don't like theatricality and that I don't enjoy it. It all depends on the work. It is one thing having my personal choices and another thing having somebody else's choices. Personally, I'm interested in the essence of movement, not in the props, the costumes, and whatever you can achieve by using all of these.

Avgi newspaper, 3/8/1997

Helena Waldmann (1962-)

German director Helena Waldmann, departing more and more from traditional theatre in recent years, brings to the public another type of spectacle, in which key elements are video projection, a narrator, and dancers whose bodies are "transformed" with lighting, which also add to the specific atmosphere of the spectacle. In her career, Helena Waldmann has worked with Heiner Mueller, George Tabori, Gerhard Bohner, and F. P. Steckel.

NH: Let's start with a general question concerning your artistic orientation.

HW: I started with theatre. My ideas were very contemporary, so people like Heiner Mueller and Robert Wilson were interested in my work. I was then doing more conventional works as well, but I decided to stop and get more involved in what I call performance. I put together everything that I had learned from theatre, choreography, music. It's strange . . . saying the word performance. What readily comes to mind is pretty much the spectacle as everybody knows it; nonetheless, it is not at all what I mean.

NH: What is «performance» for you?

HW: I would say that it is showing things that are normally present in the theatre. However, in the theatre, there traditionally exists the text and the actor. Therefore, what I got were some of the levels that exist and make a different composition. Often the result is a genre that is very tiring for the dancers—I only work with dancers now—and I tell them, "You are not the main part of the program. The main parts are the stage and the music." Our issue, therefore, is to bring all these aspects together and have a composition.

NH: When and how did your relationship with dance start?

HW: As I said, I don't work with actors anymore. I decided to do this six years ago. I thought that if I wanted to separate the different parts, it was of great importance to have someone different for each part. So in one performer, I like the movement and that he or she is different from the other, whose voice I want to hear, and so on. This liberated me and gave me the opportunity to work on small things and details that interested me.

NH: Which is the biggest difficulty when one chooses to work in this way with dancers?

HW: Dancers do have a problem with this way of work. It is hard for them to be behind the screens and not on a real stage. In «*Lucky Johnny*», for example, the dancer has almost *no body at all*. He dances with light. He moves with lights, and sometimes he is just standing onstage while his image is transmitted and he remains motionless. He is therefore no longer a dancer but someone who "gives" his body to the video projection, the lights, the screens . . .

NH: What kind of characters are you interested in? «*Lucky Johnny*» and «*Cheshire Cat*», which you are now working on, have some peculiarities.

HW: All my shows have to do with what I would call "phantasmagoria", or dreams or hallucinations. It is not a world like the one we live in. If you close your eyes tightly, you will see different things, and you can imagine different things, many things . . . It's also a little erotic, I would say . . . It's a game in which one becomes addicted.

NH: What are you trying to accomplish through your experiments with lighting and even making the body "disappear" and putting in its place another a "virtual" one?

HW: All these bodies are unreal. They are hallucinations. Johnny, for example, in «*Lucky Johnny*», is non-existent. Such a person *cannot* exist. Do you by any chance know anyone who is so lucky, especially constantly? They are fictional characters,

imaginary creatures. The performance is there to imagine things.

NH: What did you find interesting in Brecht's work that you presented at the Athens Concert Hall, namely «*Lucky Johnny*»?

HW: I liked it because there were elements in its plot that interested me, like the issue of gambling addiction, in this case, and the feelings of the players. Furthermore, it was extremely interesting for me to explore what I call 'time we don't know", and it is the unknown, which is so well displayed in the text, via the journey of "Johnny" and his mates from Havana to New York. They leave and know nothing of what is going to happen. In German, there is a specific word for this "unknown time".

NH: How did you work with this particular text?

HW: I started making images as if I were addressing children. The ship, the sea, the shark . . . All very simple and with simple symbols too. Then things became more abstract. I was interested in playing with the number of a deck of cards and the potential division of text, so that if it was a theatrical performance with speech, every evening the viewers would see different versions—that is, the events of the story—in a different order. However, in a multimedia performance, this is not interesting, so I finally presented what you saw.

NH: Within the four jacks that you projected onstage, if they were jacks, we saw four identical faces . . .

HW: Yes, they were jacks, and the faces projected on the cards were the four mates. On the porthole in the centre, it was us, the viewers; this was the fifth person, identical with the other four.

NH: In the next project, the famous cat from *Alice in Wonderland*, what will you present? The storyline is convenient, as it is a cat whose body gradually vanishes . . . and voluntarily indeed!

HW: I want to take the challenge and work with mirrors this time, further exploring the issue of hallucinations, because the cat is somehow an illusion. The interesting thing is to find a way

to show what the cat does, his disappearance, but this is not in itself the most important element. I want to explore and see the possibilities that I am given by lights, mirrors, et cetera. This work is a continuation of what I've done so far.

NH: How easy is to present such productions outside the space in which they are designed?

HW: It is not easy at all. This work is based on absolute accuracy, and I furthermore need many lights, which theatres often do not have. So I carry too many things and need two to three days to set up my performances at new places each time.

NH: How do you work with music?

HW: I've worked with the same musician on the last three projects. I tell him what I intend to do, and he thinks of clever solutions that fit perfectly with the result. Music is a key element in my work. First because I work with dancers and then because mine is not traditional theatre, so the story is being narrated by the dancers, the music, the lighting, everything!

NH: How do you choreograph?

HW: I work with improvisation. I'm not a choreographer, I don't use technical terms. I speak in a more theatrical way, I tell them what I want and k I work with the material they devise; part of it I throw away, I devise other staff myself and so on, until I finally have what I want. My dancers, though, feel free, because they don't see me as a choreographer in the most typical sense of the word. Nonetheless, they are not that free.

NH: How do you work your projects?

HW: I work separately during the day with everyone—that is, with the actor, the dancers, the musician, the person who is responsible for the video—and then all the elements come together. Rather like the cinematic process. One must also check the video material regularly because it looks different on the set than it does when one first sees it in the studio by itself. It's a slow process. I need three to four months for each work of mine.

NH: What is theatre for you?

HW: Research. And indeed for the kind of work I do, I would say that research focuses on vision. For example, each corner of a mirror that I use may change what one sees so much that many tests and effort are needed in order to arrive at the desired result.

NH: Which artists have influenced you the most?

HW: Painters, I think. Mondrian, Bacon . . . and many, many more . . . In my first project, I wanted the body to have the quality of a paintbrush. My works are like live images; I would even call them installations. Many tell me that they could be easily presented in galleries.

NH: What might this "cut" with traditional theatre mean for you in the future?

HW: I just don't feel that I have to do the exact same thing forever, and in any case, in the last six years, I have been working on something very different. I explore the possibilities that technology gives me, and for the time being, I don't want to do anything else.

Avgi newspaper, 12/13/1998

Millicent Hodson & Kenneth Archer
(Ballets Old & New)

Dance is considered an ephemeral art. Without the intervention of speech, and without the help of a notation system, several major works fell into oblivion. In the past few decades, big groups which have the appropriate technical means, but also collaborators, have specialized in the two major notation systems, namely Laban and Benesh, and recorded current material or assisted in reviving older works that artistic and managing directors want to retrieve from obscurity. These apply to works that have been considered lost or were danced by generations of dancers no longer alive. The gap of the latter case is filled by two people, Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer, the artists and scholars who managed to bring back to life choreographies considered lost until recently. [Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring* was the first, presented in 1988).] Thus they restored, on the one hand, the image of a creator, namely Vaslav Nijinsky, and on the other hand, they shed light upon the style of an era, as was the case with works by George Balanchine, from the period of the Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev, and Jean Boerlin, of the subversive Ballets Suedois of Rolf de Maré. They started working on Isadora Duncan's works after the commission they accepted by Beppe Menegatti. The works were revived for Carla Fracci, the great Italian ballerina. The four dances of Isadora's ("Fate's Warning", "L'Internazionale", "Ave Maria", "Ase's Death", from «Peer Gunt») are four soli that were created after studying the rich visual material, biographical data, and the characteristics of the era and the art of Isadora. They are all based on real works or moments of the life of Duncan.

NH: You have been working for years in a very difficult field, namely of the revival of choreographies that are considered lost. How did you decide to get involved with this area?

MH: Originally, I wanted to become a choreographer or director, and it never crossed my mind that I would work to restore life to old ballets. Nonetheless, I was really interested in the choreographies of Nijinsky. At some point, I even saw in a library at Berkeley a book about old ballets. It had photos as well, and "The Rite" seemed so modern, even for the seventies! I was impressed.

NH: What is the biggest difficulty once you enter such a process?

MH: The biggest difficulty was, and still is, facing the disbelief of others. For example, many people thought that it was impossible to revive "The Rite". They were saying, "If it is possible to do, why was it not revived by Nijinsky's contemporaries?" But his contemporaries were confused, of course. They followed the views of their time, and they obviously did not hold Nijinsky's experimentations in high esteem. The next generation was actually the one that offered stories from the Ballets Russes, with the sole purpose of helping to save the repertoire from oblivion. The next difficulty is, of course, for someone to find the work.

NH: What is the greatest satisfaction or joy from the moment one takes to revive a work considered lost?

MH: The greatest pleasure is when the dancers are getting really involved with the project and want to know *why* this step, what suggestions we have, and so on. They very much like to learn. Perhaps behind all that is the experience of a university, which they are missing out on in order to dance. They are also fascinated by the creative side of a revival—the directing decisions, for instance—that need to be made. However, as Kenneth [Archer] says, nothing can be compared to the first costume rehearsal. Regardless of how many more problems remain to be solved, it always seems like a miracle to have a lost ballet onstage again, even though we know well the effort that is required to arrive at such a moment.

NH: Could you share with us some important experience from your work?

MH: All the photos from *The Rite of Spring* [Nijinsky, 1913] were, of course, black and white. It was then very surprising, in the first test technique, to see the colour, because there were very few sketches that gave some idea of its colourful effect seen in the end project! Also, in *La Chatte* [Balanchine, 1927], the light on the plastic costumes and the metallic and plastic scenery was excellent, even by today's standards.

NH: Together with Kenneth Archer, you have worked on projects of choreographers such as Nijinsky and Balanchine. You have also choreographed on themes inspired by Isadora Duncan. Why did you choose to mainly deal with these artists? Was it their lives that fascinated, their myths, the works themselves, or something else?

MH: The Ballets Russes and Serge Diaghilev are our first love, from a historical point of view. For both of us! Isadora also lived in that same period. Furthermore, I was always fascinated by her passion to live and teach but to also dance. Isadora's soli are not a revival of her own works. Kenneth and I tried to "restore" the choreographic language that sculptor Antoine Bourdelle saw in the dance of Isadora. He named each sketch separately, as he has a whole series of reliefs at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. We could thus "read" his impressions from Isadora.

NH: What is the feeling of bringing something that was lost back to life?

MH: Kenneth and I often quote a Chinese proverb that says, "What is worthwhile appears twice." We are attracted by certain works that seem to have gone into the realm of legend, without possessing any material substance anymore. So we are helping this legend to become alive; we restore it in the flesh.

NH: How close to the original can one go?

MH: No two performances are alike, under any circumstances, even if the project is shot on film and there is recording via notation and intensive rehearsals taking place. The life of the theatre exists precisely in the integrity, in the fullness of each and every

performance. For those works surviving as part of a repertoire, one must ask oneself what the most decisive version for this project is. Even choreographies that are presented as part of a repertoire change from one generation to another, because needs and priorities differ in each period. In each project, we keep detailed notes, we observe, we make decisions within the aesthetic result that is obtained. We always say that our revivals are really, as much as possible, faithful copies.

NH: In Greece, due to the lack of money but also of the attitude of the creators themselves, sometimes a lot of material of works of older generations of choreographers has been lost. What would your advice be to those who are trying to revive some of the lost works?

MH: First, we would encourage their efforts and "push" them to define from the start the reasons that they feel a particular choreography should be revived. Then, after the process had begun, we would like them to ask themselves if their initial ideas for the project remained unchanged. Meanwhile, it helps one to be systematic even with the smallest things: diagrams with data about the performance; lists with information of the time in which the work was created, which may have influenced the artists; and opinions of critics and other witnesses that can act as sources. The mould that is created by all the information begins to shape things, no matter how fleeting the atmosphere may be.

NH: What is the *Warning of Doom* that you will present at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus?

MH: In *Warning of Doom*, you will see a work commissioned by Beppe Menegatti. He believed that we could "catch" this magic moment where Isadora, desperate from the drowning of her children, and having immobilized herself for several months, took to dancing again. This was an act of an artist's dedication to her art. Bourdelle, a friend of Isadora, had a premonition of her great loss. We felt that her dances were transferred in his own language, together with the spiritual battle as well

as the victory of life within this woman. Fracci understood everything as a woman, mother and the artist that she is. We worked closely together. Sometimes the tension—or on the contrary, calmness—between us was excellent . . .

NH: Where have you based your teaching and how was it to guide a ballerina in a genre and style so different from hers, especially since Isadora was against ballet?

MH: My teaching . . . Initially I remain alone in the studio, trying out things, changing, and so forth. Then, along with Kenneth, we prepare a dance and a certain plan—a plot, you may call it—that we can follow. This can change with its contact with the dancer. Fracci is heavier and more open than she looks, and one critic said that she was "monumental" in Isadora's soli. She is great in terms of interpretation and with a deep understanding of her heroine, of the character, and of the experiences of that heroine. Carla searches for the meaning in movement, be it ballet or anything else—and moreover, this was Isadora's criticism about ballet: movement that is cut off from spirituality and becomes sheer demonstration of skills.

NH: Why are there so very few recordings of Isadora Duncan's dances?

KA: Isadora recorded her thoughts and theory more than many critics, and certainly more than most dancers. Then, in magazines and newspapers of her time, which we had been looking at for certain revivals that we did, we do find photos and articles that cannot be found even in standard biographies of individuals. What she lacked was a codified technique such as Martha Graham's or a school-institution like Balanchine had. In any event, though, few choreographers reached such a degree of exposure, of presentation of their works.

NH: What is your next step?

KA: The creation of «*Polarities*» in Stockholm. It is an important work for us; we now want to do our own projects more.

However, in December, we shall revive the work of Darius Milhaud's *The Creation of the World*, choreographed by Jean Boerlin in 1923, for the Ballets Suedois.

Imerissia, 9/3/2000

Wim Vandekeybus (1963-)

Wim Vandekeybus is a renowned artist who was twice awarded the Bessy Award for the relationship of music and dance in his works. With his group, Ultima Vez, he has toured the globe. His works often shock because of the violent action suggested by the choreographer/director and the extreme situations that his dancers experience onstage. The talented performers of his group, in addition to their skills in dancing, also sing and possess an amazing theatricality. Flemish artist Wim Vandekeybus is one of the main representatives of the genre named «physical theatre.»

NH: Let's start with how you choreograph. Do your dancers improvise, and how much are they involved in the process of composition?

WV: The dancers begin to move after I have explained to them what kind of movement I want. It is therefore understandable that the process has nothing to do with free improvisation. It is a way of working that is possibly analogous to the theatre: the dancers need to know what the situation is, what they have to do with each other, if they have to move upwards or downwards . . . It is important to know what do.

NH: Do you start choreographing from music, an image, an idea, or a movement?

WV: I usually start from an idea, but sometimes a picture can be the idea. The process of creating a work is a very complex situation for me. I read, I research, I start having something specific behind me, but then again, I'm not afraid to change the fixed point of reference from which I started.

NH: What would you call the kind of dance that you do? Many call it physical theatre. Do you accept categorization in general and any term that applies to your work more specifically?

WV: People talk a lot about style, about genres . . . If I may say so, I don't feel I have to kill the rabbit to see what's inside! I accept that there is a certain personal style that characterizes me, that is recognizable in my work, but it is organic, intuitive.

NH: What artists have influenced you?

WV: I think that writers and filmmakers like Tarkovsky have influenced me the most . . . I don't think I have been influenced by other choreographers; otherwise, we would end up in uniformity. Besides, I come from the world of cinema and photography.

NH: Text and speech appear often in your works. This seems to be an important element for you . . .

WV: In a very small percentage, the use of speech and text could be due to my past with the theatre, although texts in my work are not at all realistic. I would say that I mostly use speech because I am interested in seeing how people talk or how it is possible to move and talk at the same time. There is a dramaturge behind the texts in my performances, along with another writer who comes in and writes things based on what we do: how we talk, how we move and so on.

NH: Do you want to shock your audience?

WV: No. Besides, "shock" is a very relative term. From country to country, tolerance levels change. I'm interested in communication, and I want the audience to be seduced by what they see. Having said that, I also believe that one should not hesitate to say what one wants to say, even if there are people who feel shocked by it.

NH: What brought you to the dance? What did you find in this art that you felt it was worth exploring?

WV: I was impressed by the intuition of movement and the body, which is a very powerful medium. I had always felt movement

like a familiar territory, although I didn't start dance early in my life. My "vocabulary" is not an academic one, and I don't care to create works that reproduce it. What I want is to make my dancers "narrators"—I want their own bodies to become the narrators.

NH: How did you end up with this specific type of movement?

WV: In 1987, I wanted to make «*What the Body Does Not Remember*», a work on the non-submission of the body to logic, on movement that happens before one thinks! So eventually, I found myself with some sort of movement vocabulary and found myself in the dance scene.

NH: In your works, you often drive your dancers to the limits of physical endurance, which furthermore requires good technique and great sturdiness if they are to follow the athletic and almost acrobatic style of movement . . .

WV: Yes. But this, I think, has to do with imagination. Pasolini was not a filmmaker—he was a writer—and when he became a director, he brought an extreme view to cinema. Maybe the fact that I don't come directly from the field of dance has liberated me and pushed me towards a more "wild" direction as well. After fifteen years of tension, it is often difficult to start from something that is harsh and hard, because I've done all this and I surely want to try other qualities. But then again, I think one must push things to the extremes, and this is a matter of personal decision.

NH: How do you mix in your choreographies your experience in photography and acting?

WV: I often make short films which are shown during the performance; I also film the dancers and take photographs of them. Right now, I am writing a script for a film I want to shoot. My past is always with me. However, I wouldn't call all this a "mixture"; they are all one thing. It's the way I think.

To Vima, 23/6/2002

Charles Linehan

British choreographer Charles Linehan, a member of the Dance Marie Rambert, resident choreographer at Place (1996-98), and dancer with the Louis Falco Dance Company, twice awarded with the JJERWOOD Award for Choreography (1998 and 1999), reveals his thoughts concerning the art of dance. "Ambiguous and obscure", in his own words, he avoids statements that may cause others to interpret his views in a restrictive or even set way.

NH: How do you choreograph? Do you have a "method" that you follow?

CL: Depends on the project! I sometimes like to do things in reverse. For the piece that I am now working on, and which I shall present next fall, I've already prepared the music, and . . . I'm thinking to move on to the costumes, perhaps with the curtsey, and slowly on to movement . . .

NH: In your last project, «*Speak, Memory*», how did you begin?

CL: I had several ideas that changes as I matured and my work developed. What I had in mind were very simple images about the passage of time and memory. Actually, it all was associated with the video projection that I used in this work to the music of Julian Swales.

NH: Do you improvise in order to find material that interests you . . . that you like?

CL: I use improvisation in rehearsals and in performances as well. What I always strive for is to make "bridges", transitions between set material and improvisational one, invisible. In my performances, improvisation relates to movement and its dynamics, I would say.

NH: What are the characteristics of your work? What make your style recognizable?

CL: I don't know if there is something . . . It might be something that has to do with the relationship between the music and the dancers. The interpretation of the dancers can completely change my point of view, my perception. I would say that my works bear my own identity, but I don't mean that in any traditional way of recognition of a particular style.

NH: You have indicated that you are interested in simplicity in expression. Why is that?

CL: It's simple! Something that is overly obvious from the beginning doesn't interest me at all.

NH: How do you situate yourself within the tradition of the English contemporary dance of the last thirty years?

CL: I don't think that there is a tradition of contemporary dance in England. At least not one that interests me personally. So . . .

NH: Then where are you situated in the wider scene as a "revolutionary"?

CL: I can't see myself as revolutionary, because there is nothing worthy to revolt against!

NH: Do you dance in your works?

CL: Only if it's absolutely necessary. It is difficult to direct, dance and choreograph at the same time.

NH: Do you easily accept feedback, opinions?

CL: I have the dancers for that . . . I suppose they are adults and mature people.

NH: And also dedicated to the choreographer.

CL: Yes, but also independent personalities. I'll have them fired if they don't do the right thing!

NH: Have you suffered from criticism or you have been an "enfant gâté"?

CL: Not at all! I've gotten horrible reviews! Actually, in reality, I've had good and bad reviews alike.

NH: What issues concern you, even if you don't "recount" them onstage in the standard linear narrative manner?

CL: I don't like to do works that speak of a particular issue as if it were a statement or manifesto. I am concerned about several different issues, but this may not be clearly recognizable in my work.

NH: Is there anything "traditional" in your works? Something you don't question or subvert?

CL: I think that nowadays, not having a strict narrative has become a traditional component! I also don't like installations at all; I want my performances to take place in a normal theatre and the clothes—the costumes, so to speak—of the dancers to be rid of any excessive theatricality. Furthermore, I don't use speech, text, or lyrics of any kind. Plus it depends on a lot if I shall finally follow the music or not.

NH: Outside of rehearsal or a show, do you listen to the music you choose for your performances?

CL: No. Otherwise, I would go mad. The music scores that I choose for my performances sometimes have a great intensity.

NH: Do you want your audience to understand your works, to feel moved by them, or do you maybe want to shock your viewers?

CL: I am not interested in this kind of attitude, and I don't deliberately shock the audience, if I do so. I think I have been a perverse artist, in the sense that I have made things which were difficult for an audience. In «*Number Stations*», I had music of which parts were altered sounds of coded messages of the Hungarian and Bulgarian secret services. I did this because I was interested in the aesthetics of the Cold War.

NH: What is your next project?

CL: It's called *The Secret*, and it is inspired by music of the sixties that was heard in American hotels in exotic places. I had used this music in a work, and it was interesting for me, a Western

listener, to find the necessary balance within the exoticism that lurked in this music.

NH: Do you "recycle" material of earlier choreographies of yours?

CL: No. Surely, though, some things are coming back automatically, and lately this concerns me, because I don't want to repeat myself. So I think after the next two projects, a duet and a quartet, I'll take a year of leave and will deal with music research in the studio.

To Vima, 29/6/2002

Cristina Hoyos (1946-)

Fiery Spaniard Cristina Hoyos speaks at yet another appearance in Greece, for the present and the future of her art. The Greek audience has come to know her not just from previous appearances (1994 and 2001) in our country but also from her roles in the films *Carmen* and *Blood Wedding*, by Carlos Saura, alongside Antonio Gades, with whom she collaborated for many years (1968-1988) before she decided to found the Ballet Cristina Hoyos (1989). With her group, she has participated in major festivals all around the world and has performed at theatres such as Covent Garden, the Paris Opera, Theatre de Chatelet, and the Nice Opera. A student of Adelita Domingo and Enrique El Cojo, she has made history in flamenco and has received numerous awards for her contribution to dance.

NH: I would like to begin by asking you what flamenco means to you.

C.H: I started flamenco when I was twelve years old. However, I had it in my mind long ago, and as you can see . . . flamenco is my life, and my life is flamenco. These two are inseparable. That's all I can say.

NH: What is this mysterious element called "duende" in flamenco? How do we know that it really exists in a flamenco performance?

CH: Flamenco is an art form—and with capital letters too—and as is the case with any art form, one doesn't need to understand but *to feel*, and I stress that. When you feel something that you can't explain, when there is something in the atmosphere of a work that agitates you or makes you feel something close to happiness, sorrow, or passion, *this is the duende*. Even for we artists that are interested in the quality of the performance and focus on many things—interpretation and so forth—every

time we want our appearance in public to be the best, to be perfect, sometimes we don't even know how and why this the duende comes in, and it is wonderful.

NH: After all these years with Antonio Gades, how did you decide to follow your own independent choreography and dancing career? How did you feel when you found yourself out there on your own?

CH: In my career, I have one part before and one after Gades, who was really important to me, as with him I learned not only how to dance in couple but also a lot more about lighting, theatricality, sound, set design . . . And all this experience was very important because Gades was the best that existed! At least until someone else as great as he comes along, something that has not yet happened. Despite all these wonderful things that happened to me in this cooperation, I felt that I needed to dance real flamenco. With Gades, it is true that I danced all principal roles in works with dramatic plot and the need for interpretation, as the bride in *Blood Wedding* or *Carmen*, a role that gave me much joy and wide recognition. However, I wanted to get back to my roots and dance flamenco wearing *bata de cola* [a dress with a long train], with guitarists and flamenco singers only! So we spoke amicably, explained to each other our plans, and decided to go separate ways. I now feel that I made this shift in the right time, when needed, and that it was the right choice for me. I feel that in the meantime, I managed to create my own style, and I feel good about that.

NH: What do you want to express with your choreography?

CH: Flamenco is an art that expresses everything about life. For example, a *seguirilla* expresses sorrow; *taranto* expresses depth, the *allegrias* and *boulerias* happiness; the *solea* passion; and so on. When I dance listening to the guitar and the singer, I want to express what I feel at that very moment, and if I do it well, the audience will feel the same feelings.

NH: What is your opinion concerning the sweeping changes that some artists have brought to flamenco?

CH: Flamenco is an art that changes and evolves constantly. The good things stay, and the bad disappear. Just since the forties and fifties, flamenco appears more stylized—for example, you can dance using classical foot positions. Nevertheless, the arms, the body, the face *must be flamenco*, and they have remained flamenco. Flamenco is an art of Andalusia and was born from the blending of many arts and many peoples: Arabs, Jews, Romans. It is a mixture that happened thanks to the people of Andalusia. Young people mix flamenco with other art. They are experimenting, and this is good. This is what young people must do. I think that this is really fine, but it's important to keep the flamenco roots at the same time. By this, I mean that, for example, we can use other music, but what will be heard, the end result, must still be flamenco. The same with the dance: we borrow many elements from ballet, modern dance, and even folk dances, always trying to come up with something that is flamenco.

NH: How far would you go in renewing your art?

CH: I'm surrounded by young people to whom I teach my own style every day, not only the steps but also stage presence and "ethos" of this art. And best thing is that I learn from them—exactly as they learn from me. They give me courage, and together we continue to renew, to update things every day.

NH: What is the one thing that may have shocked you from what you saw happening in flamenco performances in recent years?

CH: Nothing shocks me. It is that I just like some things and not others. The man who helped a lot in the development of flamenco, who mixed many styles, is Gades, and he did it very well. Now, of course, there are some young people seeking publicity and reputation very fast, not for the quality of their dance but for completely superficial reasons, and these people don't renew or evolve dance—they are just rebelling.

NH: In your opinion, what is the change that brought the best results?

CH: The stylization of the movements of the dance and the guitar. The singers have changed much less.

NH: What is in your opinion as to the future of this art?

C.H: I am an optimist, and I think—or rather, I am certain—that flamenco has a wonderful future ahead, as there are many young people who really love it and exalt it through their daily work.

NH: Do you see dance performances of other genres? Are you interested in what is happening in dance in general?

CH: I love to attend dance performances, all kinds of them. I really believe that if I had been born in another country, I still would have become a dancer . . . but maybe in another genre. I have occasionally worked with choreographers from the field of contemporary dance, and I would like to do this more in the future. One of our productions, entitled "Arsa y Toma", was done in collaboration with Ramon Oller, which comes from the scene of modern dance. Together we prepared a nice show for the Festival of the Millennium, which was very successful, and we have repeated it many times since then. Catalan singer Lluis Llach also participated in this project, singing in his own language to piano accompaniment, and we danced the flamenco. We made the necessary adjustments for this cooperation, and the result was excellent. I have in mind other dancers and choreographers from different arts with whom I would like to work. I have friends, dancers, singers, and musicians who don't come from the world of flamenco, and are not only from Spain, and I like going to see their performances. When I travel, what really pleases me is to see, if I have the time, works of other dance groups.

NH: How has contemporary art influenced your work?

CH: I think that artists in general are influenced from many directions, not only in art but also in their lives. The title of the work that I shall present in Greece should not be "In the Pace of Time" but "In the Pace of Our Times", and contemporary

art should affect you if you are to remain artistically alive. Flamenco is an art that is still developing, and it's natural to accept influences. Only folk art and folklore remain unaffected.

NH: What is the best and what is worst in dance today?

CH: As part of the culture of each country, dance liberates man, helps him to communicate with people from different places, because everyone, without the need for words or translation, immediately understands it. In flamenco, the good thing is the young people of great quality, and the bad thing is all those who care about quick reputation. But I am optimistic that this fashion will pass, it will dissolve, and only the good things will remain.

NH: What are your plans for the future?

CH: To continue to dance with my group, but not for much longer. To remain in the dance scene after that, possibly as choreographer; to soon open the Flamenco Museum in my town, Seville; to build a foundation to help those who want to become dancers but don't have the financial capacity to pursue their studies; to continue to teach and learn every day; to collaborate with other artists and much more . . . and of course to live peacefully.

NH: How many times have you come to Greece? What are your impressions of the Greek audience?

CH: I've been to Greece many times, and I'm happy about it. In the Mediterranean countries, it feels like home: culture, music, food. I must tell you that I love your cuisine—very similar to Spanish food and in fact close to Andalusia itself. And the audience is very warm in regards to flamenco. I remember when I came with my group for the first time to the Herod's Atticus Odeon, which is really one of the most magical theatres in the world. The theatre was packed, and the crowd begged for seats for twenty minutes to get to see our show. I was upset for all those who remained outside and didn't manage to see

the performance, but I was very happy finding that so many loved my art in your country.

NH: Do you think that the similarities between the peoples of the Mediterranean provide an understanding of flamenco?

CH: We do have a lot in common, even in our way of thinking, but as I said before about flamenco, you need to feel it, not to understand it.

To Vima, 14/12/2003

Thomas Plischke (1975-) & Kattrin Deufert (1973-)

Thomas Plischke and Kattrin Deufert belong to the new generation of German performers, and in a circle of European artists with difficult "taste", they reject the "dinosaurs" of the large theatres and insist on experimentation. They have excellent theoretical background and use it in a smart way in their performances. Their desire is to cause reaction or public participation, to make visible the power relations and hierarchy structures that dominate the traditional way of viewing as well as of setting up a spectacle. After their successful participation with *Gender studies* in the three-day workshop titled «B-Visible» in Ghent, and before the presentation of their new work in Frankfurt, the two performers spoke about their visit to Athens, where they were found with the help of the Goethe Institute in Athens for a choreographic composition seminar at the Athens State School of Dance.

NH: How did you find yourself in the area of dance and performance?

TP: I started studying video art at the same time dance began to interest me very much, until it became an integral part of my life. So I continued at PARTS of Anna—Teresa de Keersmaeker in Belgium, and then I started working as a choreographer, but in parallel I continued to make films and videos.

KD: My own choices were somewhat different. I studied theatre. I was interested in the way in which I could bring theatre, aesthetics, and philosophy closer, thereby combining theory and practice. My exact field was the theory of deconstruction and post-structuralism, and the subject of my thesis was the work of John Cage. Then, as I passed from the theatre to performance, other areas were added, very crucial now in our

joint work with Thomas, subjects such as the deconstruction of the narrative and gender relations.

NH: How did you practically handle these issues onstage so that theory and practice would successfully coexist?

KD: In the beginning, we just focused our attention on space, in avoiding the traditional relationship that demands the dancer to be clearly located on one side and the viewer on the other. Then we experimented with time, creating pieces that lasted a long time, up to eight hours. We also allowed the process of composition to be shown bare in front of the audience. This means that we didn't show a ready work but the process which we followed in order to create it. We used the music of John Cage as well as his method—"chance", as it is called—in everything: the form, the method, and the structure of our work. We used to bring material—that is, text, movement, video, anything—and we followed this chance method with everything.

NH: When did you make the group Frankfurter Kueche?

TP: Two years ago, and "Kueche" means kitchen. Our initial inspiration was the kitchen designed for large public spaces by Schuette-Lihotzky, of the Bauhaus group, and it was the first modern kitchen with a different view, one that goes beyond traditional functionality of such a space. We saw this name as a seductive metaphor of the process of mixing materials in a kitchen as one cooks to produce something that at times may be digestible and some other times not!

KD: In the "Frankfurter Kueche" we mix different "materials", not only movement but also music, photography, text. It all depends each time on the project.

NH: Is the process of the chance method also somehow political?

KD: It could be. In fact, the "chance" does not exist, and the whole process is very difficult. Furthermore, it has no relation to improvisation whatsoever. So if you decide to make the process visible and to link it with a statement like "I use this

way of working because I don't trust personal choices that extend between what I like and what I don't like, because it automatically puts me in a frame of power relations and hierarchy", then it could be said that this process may indeed be political.

NH: You refused to be photographed dancing . . . .

TP: Movement for us acquires meaning only within a specific context. Seeing a photo, no one knows if music preceded or was existing simultaneously, if there were other movements, if it was done in silence, and so forth. So something that is isolated like this ends up being decorative and distorts the meaning that might have been there, if all factors at one particular moment were "present" and emerged totally visible to the eye of the viewer. Therefore, I don't want to turn what interests me into something banal.

NH: What is dance for you?

KD: I think that the motto of Merce Cunningham, "Dance is movement in time and space", works well for me. It is general and gives immense freedom.

NH: What is the audience reaction to your performances?

KD: Positive, though it is easier for the audience to think of us as *choreographers*. We decided that what we bring every time is a question that we explore, in whatever way we feel most appropriate. Sometimes we use choreographic structure in order to do it, and this leads people to categorize us.

NH: Nonetheless, you *are* in a dance studio and teach "choreographic composition" . . .

TP: We introduce the students to some basic compositional process, it's true, but at the same time, we make it clear that these principles are found in books of mathematics, physics, in the way one does video editing . . . The point is for them to understand that they are independent from us, that we are "intermediaries" in the process of finding a method that they will need in search of the structure of a piece.

NH: What will your next project be?

KD: We are currently preparing two performances. The first has to do with schizophrenia, Artaud, cannibalism, with a large dose of psychoanalytic theory. It is a huge field . . . The second deals with the relationships of couples. We want to combine our overall artistic view with our autobiographies . . .

TP: I would like to say that we collaborate, with specific theatres that come into each project as co-producers. Then we show our work elsewhere too if we are invited. These organizations have supported us and do not interfere in the process. Sometimes there is some subtle pressure, even from them, but in general we manage to understand each other. Merce Cunningham once told us, "Do your job, take the money, show your work, and don't expect more!"

To Vima, May 2003

Richard Alston (1948-)

His simplicity is disarming. The same for his modesty that seems to characterize him, despite the fact that Richard Alston is one of the leading choreographers of contemporary dance and the main representatives of the British scene. From the Contemporary Dance Theatre, where he studied, he went on to create the group Strider (1972), the first independent dance company in England. In his more than thirty years of a brilliant career, he was the artistic director of such renowned dance companies as the Ballet Rambert, a collaboration that marked an era of ardent creativity and innovation, and he choreographed over twenty-five works, many of which were done from 1986 through 1992). Richard Alston has choreographed for large groups across the world, the Royal Ballet among them. Since 1994, he has been the artistic director of the famous The Place in London, while in that same year, he founded his own group, the Richard Alston Dance Company.

NH: You have been in the scene for a long time; you have influenced developments in dance. Where are you found now? Where would you place yourself?

R.A: I feel surprised when I see that my group counts almost ten years, because to me the whole story seems very new, and I really enjoy having my own group. At the Rambert, I had a great time, but it is fantastic to work in your own studio on those things that interest you and not have to worry about Merce Cunningham, Sue Davis, Trisha Brown, or anyone else. And now that I am at The Place with my group, I somehow feel that I have returned back in order to move on. When I joined the Ballet Rambert in 1980, I dealt with a group of dancers who had had a classical education. They wanted to make contemporary or modern works, but most of the

dancers were from the Royal Ballet, for example, so I think that my "language" at that my time was a hybrid—this is what I would call it—a mixture. Here I would like to say that my work "Wildlife" is one of the few that does not belong in this category, and this is why it is so important to me. With this work, I turned to gravity and to the element of Earth, with which I even now like to work. In addition, when I was at The Place as a student, I found the technique of Graham difficult—for men, Graham's floor work is very difficult—and also emotionally loaded and the teaching much too tough. Now nobody teaches in this way, but at that time, the teachers of the Graham technique yelled a lot. So Cunningham seemed like a refuge: I could get away with the floor work, so I wasn't in pain anymore, and his work was so logical and clear . . . So the choreographies of the first year showed, in an environment dominated by the influence of Graham, via Robert Cohan, for example, that I was trying to find my own voice. Therefore, the influence of Cunningham was very clear on me when I was young. Then I went to New York to the studio of Cunningham, where I stayed two years and saw many other things, and when I returned to England, I realized that it was pointless to sit there and wish Cunningham was there or Trisha Brown was there. I needed another influence, and I understood that the work of Frederick Ashton had impressed me and seemed familiar. At some point, I met him at the Royal Ballet and told him how much I admired him. Of course, he liked it; all older people like to be told something like this. So he was very nice to me, coming to see my work, and I think that his influence is still with me. You know, his works are influenced by the Cecchetti technique, not from the English system of ballet. This system has a lot of back movement, and I personally like the dance that "comes" from the back and the torso. When I returned to The Place, having worked with the techniques of all these people to create "pastiche works", like *Pulcinella*, for example, which I don't think is very important, but it is now in the curriculum in England—that's

not my fault—it was incredible coming back to the same place that I had left feeling all these things about the technique of Martha Graham. The thing with Graham, though, is that the vocabulary is so strong and so impressive that if you've learnt it correctly, you never forget it. So I think that now something from my experience with Graham surfaces in my works, but in an altered state. Now I want to dig deep to find what I really want movement-wise.

NH: What attracted you to dance and what is it that you are looking for in movement, as you just said?

RA: I am a classicist; I like a well-structured form. I want to re-examine the tradition, and I don't think that this is old-fashioned. I think it's important to look at things in a new way, and everything I saw happening in dance in the past thirty years is equally important. I'll never forget Margot Fonteyn, whom I first saw in the sixties. She was wonderful. She taught me musicality itself, and in the choreographies, she always emphasized the work and not herself, although she was a star. It was always the instrument in the hands of Ashton or Petipa. Last week, I was talking to the dancers of Scottish Ballet. I went to the office, took a big book, and told them, "I'll show you where that movement that I have put in my choreography came from." I showed them a photograph of Fonteyn doing a very low arabesque, her leg stretched behind her, and I made it clear that I wanted that line. I' m interested in the form and structure of the work, and I've never stopped being in love with real dancing. I still like to sit in the studio and watch class or teach. Every day, movement teaches me something; every day I'm learning. Dance itself interests me, but I don't consider my work abstract. Dancing is a human activity. I never say to someone to become a line, a triangle . . . All is related to what can a body can do in its amazing harmony. Every time I go to Athens, I visit Parthenon, because it's something so powerful, because the proportions are so beautiful. I'm interested in a similar harmony in the body. If done properly, a movement

ceases to solely concern this "little" common body. It concerns something much bigger; the lines extend to infinity. Dance speaks about people, and in my work now, I'm not asking anyone to be someone else, only what one does to be humane.

NH: What is your starting point when you choreograph?

RA: Always the music. Ever since I left the Rambert, I don't have a big budget, but I decided the sets would be minimal. We would have lighting, movement, and music. And what I really love is the relationship between music and movement. Usually I work with music that already exists, not a commissioned score.

NH: What is the project that you will show to the Greek audience?

RA: It's a work that I allow other groups to dance to! It is in the music of Monteverdi, music that takes me back many years, to the fifties, when my father worked for the British Council in France and had records with the first revival in the twentieth century of the works of Monteverdi. The madrigals that I have used are very expressive, with a set form of course, but are about the sufferings of love. It was like this in those times. No one wrote "Let's go have fun" about such issues; it was always pain and "Ah, ah, ah!" I'm curious to see how the Greek dancers, who have a Mediterranean flair similar to that of the Italians, as well as incredible energy, will interpret them. I think they have passion and vitality, and the result will be excellent.

NH: How do you like dance today?

RA: A lot is happening today, and when a lot is happening, there is confusion as well, and I'm very curious to see what will happen in the future. There have been revolutions, interesting things, and now there seems to be a crisis. It is difficult for the young people. What I observe is that young dancers don't get good education, and the level of dancers, at least in England, has fallen for modern dancers. with all the alternative techniques they follow before even acquiring solid dance training. In addition, ballet dancers have opened up; only a few dance

the classics. On the contrary, they can dance everything from Kylian to Forsythe. I really want to see what will happen. I continue to do what I believe in, and I think that in England some people believe I'm an old man stuck to old things.

To Vima, June 2003

Xavier Le Roy (1963-)

Xavier Le Roy, a performer with a PhD in molecular biology, considers it an absolutely normal process to switch from the laboratory to the stage. He stresses that by studying the human body in a rigorous scientific framework, he increasingly discovered subjectivity. A Frenchman who for the past eleven years has been living and choreographing in Berlin, he seems all the more connected with Germany than with France, which nonetheless did not stop him from declaring in his autobiographical work "Product of Circumstances" that "except for one or two groups, the rest of the dance scene in this country did not seem to be particularly interesting." Xavier Le Roy is a choreographer who uses his body to "express questions on identity, body images, and difference". And he is trying to "make body and spirit a moving unity".

NH: Your choices seem like an unusual combination. How do you reconcile science with art, if such a thing were of any interest to you . . .

XLR: I started dancing late, in 1987, just as I was starting my PhD in molecular biology, with my research focusing on the study of the behaviour of tumour cells in breast cancer. In the course of research, I discovered that science—in the way I ought to pursue it—had nothing to offer me, neither objectivity nor a constant. On the contrary so much of my energy was wasted in statistics and other material that I was no longer certain of its value. At the same time, I was taking dance lessons, and as my PhD advanced, the dance lessons were becoming more and more, from twice a week to daily classes. Studying the human body through the rigorous scientific framework, I was increasingly discovering subjectivity and even myths with which science overlays it. Concepts such as hierarchy, power,

and every kind of "politics" also appeared, but I was trying not to think too much about them until 1990, when I would finish my PhD. Then I started looking for a job as a dancer, with not so good results at first, and then I joined a group. In 1992, I moved to Berlin, where I've lived ever since, and gradually I began to do my own things. That's how I switched from one area to another smoothly . . . As I have already said in an autobiographical work titled "Product of Circumstances", thinking eventually became a physical experience. Maybe that says it all . . . I also try, despite the relative recognition that my work has won, to remain independent in order for my art to not follow the "laws of production" that are dictated by the market, and which existed in the previous scientific field, but also define art.

NH: How does the specific field of molecular biology influence your ideas on art or determine how you see the human body?

XLR: Perhaps via my ability of analysis, a way of approaching my object and a way of thinking, which I practiced for ten years.

NH: How exactly did you happen to choose the arts and dance vis-à-vis science?

XLR: I imagine that the fact that I like movement very much helped in this choice; in any case, I was into sports and played basketball for years. Then it was probably also my acquaintance with people who did dance. And even my geographical position; I used to live in the South of France, in Montpellier, where a lot goes on in regard to dance. Finally, a former girlfriend played an important role in my choice of dance over science.

NH: What do you want to bring to the dance scene?

XLR: Some kind of "disruption". To change the mode of production and perception of movements and of the way we perceive or understand the body.

NH: Since1991, when you began your career in dance, did you ever have to fight for your ideas? Did you encounter reactions or conflicts from the "old school"?

XLR: My practice is based on a critical view and a view that I would call "activity of the resistance". By "resistance", I don't mean that I do exactly the opposite of what already exists or that I simply subvert something, as was often done in the sixties. To resist, for me, no longer means to be against, but to be different and to emphasize subjectivity. Therefore, for me, to create doesn't mean the act of producing another world than this one, but to produce *what will turn this world into another,* which as you can see, is an endless process.

NH: What is the best and the worst in dance today?

XLR: The worst: when they think that dance is a process that requires no thought. Or when I hear people say that dance is something that they can't express in words.

NH: How do you choreograph? Do you have a specific method?

XLR: I would say that it depends on each work . . .

NH: Would you say that you have a special relationship to music?

XLR: The use of music in my work has gone through different stages: from a parallel process to complete absence until the end of the performance. Depends . . .

N.H: Video art and photography have inspired you at times. How do you think they affect dance or the way we see it?

XLR: They both constitute a specific context of perceiving things, apparently a context that can easily influence the understanding of motion and even change it. My work "Self Unfinished", which I shall present a in Greece, is an experiment that is related to these two fields, and my work "Giszelle" was another, a second experiment in the same field.

NH: You have dealt with reproducing works of two great artists of the sixties, namely Yvonne Reiner and Steve Paxton. What was the most important element that was obtained from this project?

XLR: I would say the many questions about methods of producing movement.

NH: Why did you choose to settle in Berlin? Was it the dance scene, the myth of the city, or the ambiance that seduced you?

XLR: I chose to stay in Berlin because of love . . . and love only. I went there following the woman with whom I was in love in 1992. I had no idea what it was going to be like there, especially in regard to dance!

NH: You have choreographed many solo projects. Is there something special about this form that fascinates you?

XLR: I am interested in solo works because it is a special way of "cooperation". It is also a flexible way of producing a spectacle.

NH: What is it that you want the viewer to get from your performances?

XLR: Questions!

NH: What would you say to a prospective audience about "Self Unfinished"?

XLR: I would say that one has to see it; I wouldn't like to say something about it in advance, to create any impressions . . .

NH: How difficult is it to create a project and to interpret it as well?

XLR: It's very easy. You choreograph the work, you dance it, and you dance it again and again—and of course, every time it's something different.

To Vima, 7/13/2003

Jérôme Bel (1964-)

Jérôme Bel studied at the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine of Angers, and after collaborating with choreographers such as Philippe Decoufle, he choreographed his first work in 1995. Jérôme Bel is doing everything to subvert set notions about the art of dance concerning narrative, technique, and the sense of "beauty". His performances generate very strong reactions. His irony on the privileged position of the «auteur», the author/creator, is evident. This year, his group will present to the Greek audience a work titled «The Show Must Go On», a commentary on dance, music, and cinema. Jérôme Bel has won many awards, his works are included in the repertory of European theatres, he has toured extensively, and he has had collaborations in many countries of the world.

NH: What were your ideas on dance when you first started out in this profession?

JB: To be honest, at first I wanted to become an actor, ever since I was a kid. However, when I was sixteen, I had to give up acting lessons because I was lazy and didn't even bother to learn the texts, which is the minimum required from someone who wants to become an actor, and I also think that I wasn't good enough. Blessed by this failure, I decided to take dance lessons. I didn't stop being lazy. It's just that dance was easy for me because I had many physical abilities. My teacher fell in love with me and even gave free classes! And in this way, I somehow became a dancer.

NH: How and under what influences were your original ideas about dance changed over time?

JB: After ten years of pretending—that is, from 1982 to 1992—I decided to do what I really wanted. I thought for about two

years, and in 1994 I made my first project, "Nom donné par l' auteur", which is a work in which the two dancers don't dance. They only move objects onstage for an hour. This piece was extremely radical, and many people hated it, but we still show it around the globe after ten years! This work was the act of my birth as an artist. My influences come from the fields of visual arts and artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Bruce Nauman, Andy Warhol, Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconcci, Daniel Buren, Maurizio Cattelan, Carsten Holler; and criticism: the writings of Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Nicolas Bourriaud; but mostly from philosophy: Nietzsche, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Bourdieu. Their writings, their ideas were of enormous importance for my work.

NH: Who were the artists who helped you to formulate your ideas about dance as you present it today, especially as to what you decide to do and what not to do?

JB: In regard to specifying dance, the artists who showed me what to do are Nijinsky, Xavier Le Roy, William Forsythe, Maria Ribo, Merce Cunningham, Jonathan Burrows, Jan Fabre, Maguy Marin, Raimound Hoghe, Pina Bausch, Boris Charmatz, Myriam Gourfink, Marius Petipa, Eve Meyer-Keller, Trisha Brown, Bruno Beltrao, and Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker. On the other side of the spectrum, those who showed me what not to do were Maurice Béjart, Roland Petit, the Pilobolous, John Neumaier, Sasha Waltz, Angelin Preljocaj, Catherine Diverres, Edouard Locke, Lloyd Newson, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Blanca Li, Martha Graham, Hans van Manen, Wim Vandekeybus, Twyla Tharp, and many more!

NH: What do you call yourself, choreographer or something else?

JB: I try to avoid the term "choreographer" for myself. I prefer that of artist, or creator, or even director. NH: How do you work composition-wise? How you work with your dancers?

JB: Each project requires a different process, which is always difficult to explain to my producers. A project may require many rehearsals, while for another a couple of hours may be

enough! In general, what happens is that I write my own work, and then I meet the performers to do it. It is not group work, and we don't improvise. I direct the process entirely, because what is going to happen onstage is very precise. Some people like it, and others don't. Those who don't like the process can leave the group at any time; after all, there is no exclusivity contract. What is important is for them to understand the work and support it. I ask from the performers of the group more than some virtuosic technique in order to understand the project.

NH: What is your opinion on dance in France today? There were some disappointments in recent years.

JB: I'm not interested in this kind of thinking. I work across the world, and the "French condition" sometimes seems to me totally passive. The problems of French dance are mostly institutional, and these issues don't concern me at all, though of course I have to work on that level as well.

NH: How did you arrive at your current style?

JB: I've never wondered about this, ever; I've already worked for twelve years, and I don't care at all about the idea of a "style". Everyone says that there is a "Jérôme Bel" style, but I'd be the last to acknowledge it, and this is natural, isn't it? What I do is not a style but my "language", my mental structure.

NH: Which is your most important work for you?

JB: The most important for me is not a work but a thought: how to think of reality, how to perceive it, how to be conscious of it. Art is a good tool for this because through it, you try to represent reality, and as you represent it, it comes to existence and thought is created.

NH: How do you see your relationship with the audience?

JB: The relationship of the spectacles I create with the audience is of paramount importance. For me, a spectacle is co-created by the creator, the performers, and the audience. If any of these elements is missing, there is no spectacle. A movie can

be projected by itself without an audience, as is the case with TV—they can play alone in a room—but if there are no spectators in a theatre, the performers can't do the show! I especially have great need of the viewers, because I learn from them things about the work that I have made. I need their "interpretation".

NH: Are you worried about the growing success and recognition of your projects? Worried about things like conformism and being conventional?

JB: I'm not worried at all, because I don't care about fame and money. I have enjoyed recognition in recent years. Your offer is acknowledged, your work, and then they invite you to meet other famous people, and eventually you realize that you can find the same percentage of idiots among the famous as among the non-famous! The rumour is tasteless in comparison to the intensity of the moment that I am writing a play or spending time at the theatre with the performers. So what I'll fight for are my independence, my loneliness, and my ability to meet some smart performers to work with them.

NH: Why do you use speech in your works?

JB: I realized quite on time something very obvious, that language is the best medium of communication that mankind has ever devised, the most "performative" in the sense of its possibility of representation, and these are the reasons why in my works, silently, quietly, there is increasingly more use of speech.

NH: What would you like the relationship of your projects with music and sound to be in general?

JB: Smart!

NH: Your future plans?

JB: I'm working on a project for the Ballet of the Paris Opera, which is to be presented in September, and then we will premiere "The Show Must Go On 2" in Brussels, and in November I shall present a work titled "A House Full of Music", on works of John Cage, at the View Modern, a festival of contemporary

music. Apart from these, our repertoire is touring around the world, and I shall take part in symposia on performance and philosophy in Frankfurt, Paris, and Singapore.

To Vima, 7/11/2004

Juan Kruz de Garaio Esnaola (1966-) & Luc Dunberry (1969-)

The Basque Juan Kruz Diaz de Garaio Esnaola, member of the Schaubuehne am Lehniner Platz, the theatre that was founded in 1962 and with which great figures of German theatre and dance have collaborated, will be in Athens for two different artistic events: to present with Luc Dunberry, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and Damien Jalet the work titled «D 'Avant» (2002) and then to dance in the duet «My Dearest, My Fairest . . . » with the Australian Joanna Dudley (a performer, singer, and director). Luc Dunberry, will present a world premiere of a video dance titled «Left Behind Us». Juan Kruz Diaz de Garaio Esnaola, having done musical studies, began to dance in the early nineties, and in 1996 he started his collaboration with the choreographer of Schaubuehne, Sasha Waltz. Canadian Luc Dunberry, apart from his participation in Schaubuehne, has some choreographic works to show as an independent artist, with «Seriously» being his best-known one. «D 'Avant» is an original work, intensely theatrical, for four performers who sing in addition to continuous action. The music of the work is the choice of Juan Kruz de Garaio Esnaola.

NH: How does one start to create a piece like "D'Avant", difficult and complex in terms of movement as well as with its singing parts?

JKE: In my career so far in dance and in music, and after many projects dealing with the integration of music into a dance-theatrical work, I found myself with the desire to try uniting voice and movement on equal terms, while in parallel I would somehow "narrate" the story. I met Sidi Larbi and Damien [Jalet] after I had seen their work, and I'd already known Luc

[Dunberry] for a long time, as we had worked together on several occasions, and I thought this would be a great team to share this challenge. The idea appealed to all very much, and we then just tried to find time to rehearse, as we all had crazy schedules!

LD: First I would like to say that this project was the idea of Juan. We had a few projects with Sasha Waltz in which movement and music coexisted, and it was a great idea for further investigation, to have these two elements in equal importance.

NH: In "D Avant", it seems you comment on or condemn various fundamentalisms. Which is ultimately the "meaning of this work"?

JKE: Because of my repertory, which includes Western medieval music which was created at the era of the Crusades and the political situation in which we lived at the time we were choreographing the piece, which I have to say continues unchanged, came somehow to force the issue of the relationship between religion and politics and religion and power as a tool conducive to the manipulation of people. We were nevertheless careful in regards to criticism or expressing doubt about the views of religions from which we borrowed some symbols.

LD: I'm not sure if we want our work to have a certain sense . . . Comments on "fundamentalism" simply reflect the world in which we live today. These ideological currents exist, and it is up to the audience to draw their own conclusions and judge for themselves. I hope that at the show, having removed the symbols from their "natural space" to be able to achieve a certain detachment and to tackle issues such as the absurdity of war instigated by religious differences.

NH: How did you choreograph this work?

JKE: Although the project was my idea, I was interested in working with the other performers, and I offered to co-choreograph as well as co-direct the project. It was extremely interesting to find solutions to problems or have questions arise which we

tried to answer together in order to satisfy all opinions. This often led us to solutions that were not necessarily those that each of us had in mind from the outset! The collaboration was harmonious because we shared the same universe, or the same poetry, if you want, and none of us was afraid to face moments of disagreement.

LD: The starting point was music. End of story. We learned all the songs before we started choreographing any movement. Sometimes the content of the songs gave us "food for choreography" and the work took its form as we were experimenting.

NH: Juan Kruz, who was responsible for the music of the work, how was led to that particular choice, I mean Medieval music and singing?

JKE: The music we used was Western medieval music of the seventh until the twelfth century, more or less, and there were some pieces of Italian folk music as well. Within this repertory, I tried to find works which, coming from a country or culture, due to historical reasons such as migration or invasion, were "infected" and enriched by other cultures.

NH: How did you work with the other performers on the singing part of the performance?

JKE: We met here and there, in various cities, whenever touring allowed it, and I taught them the music. I made a first selection which I elaborated in order to find different ways of interpretation. When we went into the studio and started the dancing part, and later on when we moved on to choreography, the needs of what we were creating dictated a series of changes and variations. Technically, I was interested in working with what their voices had to offer, with their specific qualities alone, escaping any preconceptions about how a skilled voice should sound.

NH: How atmosphere and policy of Schaubuehne helps and encourages young artists to present their own work?

JKE: They were the ones who offered financial support and infrastructure to make this work!

LD: It was always clear to the management of the organization, Sasha Waltz and Jochen Santig, the need to promote and encourage people to create their own works, and they really supported us in every step we took. Schaubuehne offers all the technical facilities and is an ideal place for one to work.

NH: What are the reactions to "D' Avant" so far?

LD: Very positive—so far. I think this is due to live music that strengthens the side of performance . . .

JKE: The reactions are extremely positive. There is something about the issues that appear in the project and the "fragility" and sensitivity that we as performers need to show that seems to touch the audience.

NH: Are you interested in the audience understanding your work?

LD: That's exactly what worries me right at this time. What is it that we expect to be understood? If it is a clear message, then one would tend to use speech, which is more likely to meet with the demands of such a requirement. But what is it that dance can carry out in its own proper way? I believe that you can touch a part of the audience's awareness through body language, and it is not necessarily about something you want to express with words. Some people tend to be too preoccupied with the primary idea of the choreographer. I think that all people should get what they can from a work and evaluate their experiences in this context. I'm not saying that we should exclude discussions on the "primary idea", but they tend to deviate, especially when people feel that they haven't "gotten" what exactly went on in the piece . . .

JKE: I want to affect people emotionally. I sometimes want to ask questions, and I may want them to find some of their own experiences in my work. But I'm not talking about a single reading of a work, and I assume that every member of the audience has his or her own reading and interpretation. The

audience, however, should accept the initiative and responsibility required of it in order to find their own interpretation.

NH: How do you see recognition and fame? Are you afraid that they might reduce the momentum of your will to experimentation?

JKE: I don't work for success and recognition. Although as artists, we publicize our work and it will eventually be judged by the audience, it is the months before the show, the time I spend researching, the time I challenge, when I question and doubt myself that I find extremely rich. No failure can take from me what I have probably discovered, what I discovered, as well as the journey that I may have made on a personal and artistic level.

LD: I think that I do what I do only as an attempt to communicate on a different level. From this point of view, recognition and success are completely irrelevant. You naturally need a minimum of recognition in order to be able to present your work, and I don't see this as potentially dangerous. Furthermore, I shall not go to the other extreme and say that it is not nice to feel some recognition for what you do!

NH: Are you planning another project together—all four of you?

JKE: I don't know if in the future some other project or the time availability of each one of us will allow us to work together. Right now, we all do separate pieces, and we have additional obligations as dancers of Sasha Waltz.

LD: I am planning a project for next summer, and I want Juan to be in it, but for now there is nothing more . . .

NH: Which artists have helped you shape your ideas on dance and choreography?

LD: I like to think of myself as someone who collects information from everywhere: works of other artists, popular culture, politics, with the simple desire to be connected with the world of today.

JKE: This would require a lot of time to recount them all, because many things—many people, events, dreams, and realities—in my life made me who I am.

NH: Luc Dunberry, what is the piece "Left Behind Us", which you will show at the video-dance festival?

LD: It's a small project I did last year. I am a great fan of movies, and I've longed for quite some time now to play with the camera. I had no previous experience except for my participation in certain productions as a performer, but I did it as an exercise, to understand the medium. I wrote some scenes, I used a lot of improvisation, and I played with the actors. It is not exactly a "video dance", I don't think, although I made it thinking "choreographically." I enjoyed it and would like to repeat it!

NH: Your future plans?

JKE: Right now I' m rehearsing for my new piece, which is again a duet with Joanna Dudley, with whom I created «My Dearest, My Fairest», which we shall show at the video-dance festival. It is titled *Colors May Fade With Friction Read Instructions Carefully Store In A Cool And Dry Place No Side Effects*! It will premiere in October, and immediately after that, I start rehearsals with Sasha Waltz for her new piece, which is Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas.*

LD: I keep things open. I went to Germany eight years ago thinking that I would stay for a few months, yet I'm still there, so it becomes obvious that I go with the current! I would like to continue creative work and to work with interesting people.

To Vima, 12/9/2004

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (1976-)

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, former dancer of the Ballets C de la B in Belgium, collaborated with three other young performers to create the "D 'Avant", a piece that we saw in Greece as well. In parallel, he advanced his personal work that led him down the path of autonomous choreographic expression. The *Rien de Rien*, *Foi* and *Tempus Fugit* were his passport for the first international appearances as a freelance artist. He went on creating *In Memoriam* to music from Corsica. Belgian-Morrocan choreographer Larbi Cherkaoui is only twenty-eight years old.

NH: You are moving way too fast! How did it all start?

SLC: I graduated from PARTS, the school of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker in Brussels, and then I started to dance with Alain Platel, but because Alain is more a director than a choreographer, I soon began to do my own things. My first opportunity was in the collective work *It's so Bach*, to Bach's music. I was in the group as a dancer, but I could make my own material as well, which led to my first project, *Rien de Rien*, in 2000, and then I just continued . . .

NH: Do you think that your origin has contributed to your artistic identity?

SLC: Mixing elements makes us who we are, makes us interesting . . . The same mixing would be if my parents were from the same country. Of course, everyone classifies people into specific categories based on their origin, and then they have to live within the limits of this classification. This is a recurring theme in the works I create.

NH: In "D' Avant", you wore the white cap of an Arab . . .

SLC: It is indeed Arab, but most people think it is Jewish! This is what they thought in Germany, for example. I don't mind, though, and I like this misunderstanding, because people forget how many common elements there are between the Arab and Jewish cultures. It's almost the same thing; even the languages are similar. It is interesting to tackle such a difficult subject. It's almost like saying that despite divisions, there are several things in common.

NH: I shall return to the issue of the origin and identity after what we just said . . .

SLC: I don't know . . . When I was younger, I went to the reading of the Qur'an, and I was the only white there, and vice versa. All my life, I had to say my name five times until they understood it. I always had to explain the situation, and in a sense, I do it now . . . It's a shame, though, that today everybody equates the Arab community with the Islamic fundamentalism. To me, and I'm an Arab, there is no such connection, but people tend to oversimplify and to class situations that are different as identical . . . There is not one Islam but many, in a sense. There is a huge variety, as is the case with the West, within one culture. There are areas in Africa that are Muslim, yet women go around topless; however, people prefer to view the versions of austerity and the burqa. It's awful, because I think that after a while, a situation is created which everybody believes is entirely true. If you see diversity, you will create diversity, but if you equate everything, then this will dominate. I remember when I was a kid in Morocco. I never felt any inequality between men and women. I saw that women were omnipotent in their homes and that their opinion significantly affected decisions as well as what would happen in all areas. I could not see what I had heard in Europe, about oppression and lack of rights . . . But everything depends on the perception of reality, which is totally subjective.

NH: How do all these appear in your works?

SLC: By trying to find ways to make the references I want to make without becoming explanatory or didactic. In "D' Avant", for example, I like many people to think that I'm a Jew. I know that people have prejudices, even though they deny it. I know that in Belgium they talk differently to me as a Moroccan with my hair dyed blonde than they would talk to a friend of mine who has kept his normal hair colour. I notice on a daily basis that there are variations in attitude toward social categories, and I like to subvert the stereotypes to see the reactions.

NH: How does one talk today about politics in a piece without appearing naive?

SLC: The material is generated slowly from small duets or soli, and then we improvise on various situations; thus scenes are created. Then we need to decide their order, and there the process is totally logical. You start from the non-logical and end up with something completely logical. As for the rest, the material of the performances does not change structurally, although we may work again on something that seems that it doesn't work, but we don't improvise, because when everything finds its place, as it would do in a puzzle, it can't change anymore.

NH: What do you want from the audience?

SLC: To understand my work, but in an emotional way, not intellectually. I also want them to accept ambiguity without anxiety about what I "really wanted to say"! I could explain this to them, but it doesn't make any sense. It is just reassuring.

NH: Narrative or formalism?

SLC: Narrative, but in the broadest sense of the term. I don't believe in abstraction. In all works, no matter at which point we delve in and start to watch, our brains are structured in a way that we will perceive it as beginning, middle, end. Even if one did a project where people could come and go at any moment they pleased, even then, for everyone, it would still have the form I just described. So there is no abstraction; there is only narrative. Everything is a narrative . . .

NH: What stories do you tell?

SLC: I sometimes have very violent stories, as in my penultimate work, and the reactions are very strong. Therefore, in my last piece, I decided to react, and I made a project on happiness, setting it to Arabic and Corsican music. On the level of terrorism, however, Arabic and Corsican elements have a prominent place, so in a sense, I also did this for my own political reasons. Critics and the audience considered it a "musical with nice music", and indeed that was said as a positive comment! I felt deceived and sad because they didn't get into the second reading level. Some others thought it was "light", and I think that it's terrible in a culture for all "depth" to have to derive from grief. It therefore makes sense that the world is as it is. I was angry about the reactions to this piece, but I think it was a success. My work has confirmed that we don't trust good, happy, positive elements in life. I have that too myself, and I would like to change it somehow.

Avgi newspaper, 19/12/2004

Prue Lang (1972-)

A dancer with the Bouvier/Obadia and their group, L 'Esquisse, and of William Forsythe in the creative years of his cooperation with the Frankfurt Ballet, Prue Lang choreographed for the group the works "Narc", "Intervenus", "ScreenPlay", "Uncharted", and "Infinite Temporal Series", which won her recognition. The Australian choreographer will present her most recent piece, titled "Fiftyfourville" (2005), in Greece. We talked with her during her first appearance in our country.

NH: What is the work with the intriguing title "Fiftyfourville"?

PL: It is the title of the project, and it refers to a space in which a micro-society, practically four dancers, share the same logic and the silent language of movement.

NH: What topics interest you?

PL: I am interested in the way which dictates people from inside them to react or behave and approach differently the same system, be it an idea, rules, or specific structures which define space. In creating this piece, an important role played my interest in the idea of the labyrinth and how one can define his or her own course in a space that already exists.

NH: Where would you place yourself in relation to your style and your artistic choices?

PL: As a choreographer, I am fascinated by what is happening outside the body, as well as in the body itself. I pay a lot of attention to the "negative" space between the performers and how individual decisions of people can transform and influence the actions of others. For me, the conceptual approach of choreography is very important, but I nonetheless never underestimate the complex instrument that is the dancer. I don't

always produce the most entertaining kind of performance, but what I do is more interesting for me.

NH: How do you feel being an "Australian in Europe", to paraphrase Sting, and why did you choose Berlin?

PL: I would say that my base is Paris—and that I work moving between Germany, Belgium, and France. I am nine years in Europe, and now I feel like I am at home. To live in Europe allows me access to a richer artistic environment than that of Australia; it has multifarious cultural experiences and dialogues from which I draw inspiration.

NH: How do you start to choreograph?

PL: Usually my ideas come from philosophy, literature, and various obsessions. Each piece has a different starting point, but it always grows for quite some time inside my head and on paper before I enter the studio to work on it.

NH: Space is very important for you. Is that referring to how you use it or the "shape" of it?

PL: In each project, I use it differently. I define space in a very clear way through the construction of sets, but other times I set the space only through the body, as in "Fiftyfourville", which is far more subtle and requires a different level of engagement from the viewer. It amuses me to play with orientation and proximity, away from traditional theatre structures.

NH: Tell me about your collaboration with the dancers.

PL: The dancers I work with are dancers-choreographers. Once I start working in the studio, I ask for a remarkably large contribution from them. This enables me to create work while they keep changing their individual decisions and their ways of thinking, which allows them to get spontaneous decisions on the individual level, but within a common system. For me, this is a true collaboration; I could not create this kind of spectacle without it.

NH: What about your cooperation with the musicians?

PL: Unfortunately, until now, I couldn't afford to work with a composer. I usually work with set music and then with a sound designer.

NH: Do you think there is "female" choreography? If yes, what is your opinion on the subject?

PL: I don't think there is necessarily female choreographic writing, for I have worked with many talented people of both genders. Nevertheless, I believe that there is definitely a female gaze toward the body which may differ from the male gaze, and I think it is important to ask ourselves and to be aware of this issue when creating, but also when we see a dance performance.

NH: What is your biggest ambition for the future?

PL: To be able to find a situation, a condition that will enable me to develop my work in depth, which means, among other things, to have more time before the show and have more freedom to mix different genres and art forms. These are long-term plans. For now, I am trying to find better financial support and am preparing my next project.

Avgi newspaper*, 22/7/2005*

Carmen De Lavallade (1931-)

Complexions, the group founded in 1994 by Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, with many awards, performances, and tours, promises to its prospective audience fun, action, skill, and humour. The works that will be presented by Complexions are *RED/The Force* (2002), choreographed by Dwight Roden, and a collage of short pieces and excerpts of longer works, with titles such as *Gone*, «Loop and Gesture», «Please Please Please», and so forth. The artistic director of the group is a woman-myth, namely Carmen de Lavallade, a dancer who started out from the studio of Lester Horton and played in movies as well as danced in works by artists such as Agnes de Mille, John Butler, and Glen Tetley. A principal dancer at the Metropolitan Opera and professor of kinesiology at the University of Yale, with worldwide recognition and a cooperation of great importance with Alvin Ailey, the star choreographer made the first conscious steps in the 1960s and 1970s, through his art, towards respect and integration of black culture.

NH: How did you decide to start dancing, and what have you retained from the time with Lester Horton?

CDL: The reason I wanted to dance was to follow in the footsteps of my cousin Janet Collins, who was a great dancer. She was my idol. She died last year, but her spirit is still with me. As for what I kept from Lester Horton, the . . . The education I received from him, is the reason that my career in dance lasted for so long. With him, we didn't only learn some dance techniques, but we also had to participate in all kinds of theatrical activities. Apart from interpreting and taking part in performances, we also had to help in sewing the costumes, in the construction of the sets and props that would be used in the show, work with technicians, and clean the theatre after the show. All this not

only helped me to accept and to be able to cope with difficult situations that I might have to face at some point ahead, but to also appreciate all that is required and is theatre.

NH: How did you deal with the role of Salome in the piece *Face of Violence*, which Horton created for you? This role meant something for you, especially at a time when human and women's rights were at another level than today, correct?

CDL: Regarding Salome and questions about this role, I should tell you that I inherited it from Bella Lewitsky (1916-2004). In fact, the *Face of Violence* was the fourth version of Lester, of this story. While still a student, I had watched Bella rehearse and interpret Salome, and I was a member of the percussion orchestra that accompanied the piece. Lester had created an amazing musical accompaniment, with drums, bells, and all kinds of unusual instruments. I wiggled screws into a cup and a rattle on a zither! When I learnt my role, which Bella taught me, Lester encouraged me to put into it elements of my own. He even changed some parts of the choreography for my sake, because I was taller than Bella. So he changed the movements to fit my body. This is what made him such a unique artist and teacher . . . He didn't expect me to become Bella, but wanted me to be myself, Carmen! It is perhaps for this reason that he changed the title and made it *Face of Violence*. Each "Salome" belonged to the dancer who interpreted the role each time, to me at the time and to others later. What I wanted to say is that the face of Salome changed every time depending on the personality of the dancer. There is so much freedom in it! I would also like to confess that when I was eighteen, I had no concern about women's rights whatsoever. The only thing that interested me was my work with Lester Horton and performances on weekends in that amazing little theatre in Melrose Avenue.

NH: What is it that you are missing in today's dance scene?

CDL: What I miss most are the narrative works, but that was probably part of the experience of my generation, which is why I feel this

way. Today "narrative" has become more abstract. The good thing with the new situation is that the works are more theatrical and the dancers and choreographers have the advantage of being able to use other art forms as well as technology and film.

NH: How did your close friend and collaborator for a while, namely Alvin Ailey, handle issues concerning art and racial problems, and how common were your visions?

CDL: I cannot speak about Alvin in regards to how he handled extreme problems of his art, but I can say that he was always, in everything that he did, genuine and truthful; and so he was in his faith, in his vision, without allowing criticism to influence him. He also had the good fortune to have a very strong group that supported him and loved him. As for me, I handle racism by doing the best I can artistically and ignoring narrow-minded people.

NH: You were onstage with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1993. So you keep in touch with the younger generations of artists. However, how did you decide to collaborate as artistic adviser with the group Complexions?

CDL: I fell in love with this group from the first time I saw them! The dancers were exquisite; each one of them was an experienced soloist. Dwight [Rhoden] asked me to participate in their performances as a dancer and actress, and along the way, he choreographed a beautiful duet for Gus Solomons Jr. and me, titled *It all*, for Paradigm, a theatre group for older performers. For the younger generations that you mentioned, I generally have to say that it is great to work with young choreographers: we learn from their new ideas, and they learn from our experience. Dwight gave Gus and me the best compliment when he said, "The reason I like to work with you is that when I give you the movements, I can see you already interpreting them." I believe that Complexions is a truly unique group; I am sure that Athens will love them and that they will love Athens!

NH: What are you plans for the future?

CDL: For the future, I plan to continue to be inspired and artistically creative until the Muses decide otherwise. Placido Domingo has said, "Rest is followed by rust"!

Avgi newspaper*, September 2005*

Sasha Waltz (1963-)

Sasha Waltz defines her work as a "new melange"—a dance theatre situated in the crossroads between the tradition of American postmodern dance and of German modern dance. She started as a pupil of a Wigman disciple before setting off for the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam and then New York. Sasha Waltz and Guests was the name of the group she formed in 1993 with Jochen Santig, which she kept until 1999, the year she joined Schaubuehne-am Lehniner Platz, a place that became synonymous to her work and which she recently left to join the rat race of freelance artists once more.

NH: You are about to leave Scaubuehne and to become freelance again. Nonetheless, Jochen Santig mentioned in a discussion a few days ago, that you are still going to perform in Schaubuehne. Isn't it a strange cohabitation?

SW: The situation is like this: we are going to become an independent company, but we are going to work in cooperation with Scahubuehne; it is a very special model that we have developed with Schaubuehne and with the senate—that is, with the city—and it will run for one year. Then we shall see how we shall continue. In this way, we shall be free to do many other things, not just in Schaubuehne but in other places as well. We shall be a totally independent company, administratively and financially.

NH: How is the company going to survive? Are you planning to line up for a subsidy from the state?

SW: I would say that the whole construction regarding the company is extremely complicated. The subsidy will still go through the Schaubuehne, and from there it will come to us, but as

we are an independent group, when we are going on tour, for example, we shall have nothing to do with the Schaubuehne. In addition, the project we did last summer at the church, as well as the Dialogue project at the Palast der Republik, were both made possible through subsidies we received from a special source which is for special productions, and we are planning to apply for it again. The opera I am now working on is financed through that too; we also plan to find theatres which would like to invest in co-productions with us, theatres that we have worked with in the past or others which can become completely new partners. It will then be a mix between the money we shall receive from the Scahubuehne as collaborators, the extra funds from the city, and co-production money.

NH: You will probably need a rehearsal space. Will you still be using the church where you performed in the summer?

SW: Maybe we shall perform there again at some point, but this should rather become a kind of open place for exchange . . . We have a rehearsal space in our contract with the Schaubuehne, which will be our studio for one year.

NH: You said that the city might help your company; do you believe that Berlin helps dance? In Greece, for example, we seriously doubt whether the city authorities do anything worthy for dance . . .

SW: Well, there is special funding, and they always try to change the ways they are supporting dance. There are different strategies and various discussions on that, and I can tell you that sometimes I feel it's OK and that I also have a lot of criticism about it, but if I compare it to the American situation, I think ours is quite fantastic! It depends from which perspective you look at it. An independent dance company—I mean, a modern ensemble—doesn't really exist in Berlin, but there are lots of independent small groups. However, there is not an ensemble for contemporary dance, and this is really what we are trying to do . . . What I think is really important is to give the dancers a basic structure like studio space, some administrative help, and

some basic funding. In my opinion, this is the essential policy that should be followed.

NH: You mentioned earlier that there are many good things being done by the city authorities regarding dance, but that you also have a lot of criticism on several issues. What would be these issues?

SW: Many times they dispense with what could be called "flexible money". Berlin is in a very bad financial situation; therefore, whenever there is a cut, it always concerns money for "immediate" and "spontaneous" projects, and although this is always a small amount of money, cuts nonetheless often focus on this kind of funding. It is taken out very quickly, without hesitation, while big budgets for big institutions are—surprisingly—easier to keep. They would readily give more money to an already established organization—like, for example, the Scahubuehne—than support a new structure, as we would be as a company. They are very hesitant to do that. They should help to support new structures and new developments and not to keep the old dinosaurs alive . . . I think that they should restructure the theatre system, and there are things that are being done in this direction, but not enough.

NH: Does the general situation you just described have anything to do with the ability to tour and to show work of independent small companies?

SW: I think that touring has to do with the quality of the work of each group . . . There are many people who tour internationally, like Xavier Le Roy, Anna Hubert, and Thomas Lehmen, and there are smaller groups which do tour in Germany. I don't think that touring has anything to do with belonging to a special network or with promotion; it solely has to do with the quality of the work of an artist. As far as I can judge from our personal experience, in the beginning, we had no support. We just started from zero, and we were touring. There are systems that are really supporting artists in the beginning of their careers, like the Goethe Institut. It may help to diffuse the

work, to show it in different places. Then it is also important to build up relations with theatres and so on. What I also criticize is that a lot of money and effort is given to the preparation of pieces that are going to be performed three times and then they are over! For me, the piece has not even started after three times. It is nothing! It has just come out and then it has to grow, to develop, and then it becomes a piece. I think that the same amount of energy that goes into the production should also be given to tour this piece, but this requires a change of mentality—to not just focus on the product but also on the experience of the stage, of playing, of developing a piece further through performing it, and of course, there should be money and the possibility to do that!

NH: Going independent might mean a need for special arrangements for all sorts of reasons. For example, how are you going to support the touring of big works, yours or others who are joining you in your company? "D' Avant" could be an example of that.

SW: Well, you chose a piece which refers to a very complicated situation as far as the performers are concerned, as they have a tough schedule in different countries, but what I can say is that we shall keep the works in our repertoire, and then we can present them on different occasions . . .

NH: Does going independent signify any other changes in style and so forth?

SW: There is a change at the moment, as I am working on an opera: *Dido and Aeneas*, by Henry Purcell; it is really a change! I am going into mythology and so on. I work with live music, old music, an orchestra, and for the first time, with a libretto, with a narrative. I mean, I have worked with narratives before, but they were created by me. So I think that there is this big change at the moment, but then afterwards, the next project will refer to "Inside Out", and it will be a further development of certain things already present in that piece. But all this is happening, and I don't choose to do these things on purpose,

thinking, "I shall change my subjects because I am leaving the Scahubuehne." No. It is a coincidence: the Scaubuehne did not want to produce an opera, and as we are now already independent, we can do this project.

NH: How is it to work with this "old music" and a libretto?

SW: In the beginning, I feared it might be a strong limitation, but I think that it can be an opening, and I hope I shall experience it as such. We have the characters, a rich storyline that "nourishes" the characters, the music, the structure . . . It is a very rich base to play on . . . It is also different for the dancers; you see, we usually start from nothing! I mean, we have the concept, I explain the concept and have certain physical ideas, I have a musical structure, or a very clear set, as I often start with a spatial idea, and then we try to develop all the physical qualities so that they will acquire meaning. Now, though, it is shocking somehow, because we have a character and there is already meaning in this character because of the story; there is a reason for the things that are happening, and it is different because usually we have to find the meaning so that there is sense to what a character does.

NH: Does this strict narrative leave you any possibilities of abstraction?

SW: I try to keep an abstract level but also keep the narrative. I also don't go back to the libretto all the time, because it is very intense and short, but I try to go back to Aeneas and where he comes from, to see a little bit of the historical context and understand a bit more the libretto and the action. I think that in a way, I am trying to make a fusion of my older and more recent works in this production.

NH: What do you expect from your audience?

SW: I try to make them question things and experience something they will think about or, even better, something that they will sense. I am interested in making them more sensitive to things and perception . . . In the fun culture of this world, I would

like to be on the opposite side, but not just to address people's intellect; I would like to be a sensitive and sensual "questioner".

NH: Have you been radical?

SW: I try to go as far as possible to renew my vocabulary and not to repeat myself. I have always tried to develop a new language for each piece. At the moment, though, I feel that I have a wide vocabulary, and I want to deepen certain parts of this material. I've never done that before. I've always said, "OK, we have done that. Let's move on to something new."

NH: What is your "vocabulary" made of?

SW: I work with physical contact in various ways, and then I give different qualities to my material. The most significant part of my work began in 1999, when I started to work at the Schaubuehne, in big spaces, with many dancers. I still find that interesting. I also like sculpting the space through the body figurations. I would say that my work method is improvisation—it's a very big source—and I really start from the qualities of the individual, of the dancer, to whom I don't impose my own thing. I want to keep their uniqueness alive.

NH: What are your influences?

SW: In the past, I would say cinema, but not anymore. Nowadays, influence comes from daily life, newspapers, situations that you observe. The strongest influence, though, for me, comes definitely from the visual arts.

NH: Do you feel part of a certain tradition of German dance, and which tradition is this?

SW: I think that I relate myself more to the American postmodern dance. I studied it—it is part of me—but I also relate myself to the German modern dance of the thirties. I recently started to also understand something that had deeply influenced me in the beginning of my dance education in the choric parts which I create. When I see books with photos from that period, I feel somehow related. My dance training was also with a

Wigman student. I mean, I do dance theatre, no? But somehow a different dance theatre, another melange, a new melange.

NH: I can't help asking your opinion on the tradition and people of the German modern dance of the thirties . . .

SW: Wigman was the most striking figure; there were other significant artists as well, but I think that Wigman's work influenced many people through her students who took her doctrine to the States, because they had to leave Germany somehow . . . I think that she had a very open mind regarding movement, and she worked with improvisation, not with rigid forms. She was also starting from an inner sensation and not from the outside form. I invited Susanne Linke, who is now sixty and who had studied with some of those people, to one of the Dialogue projects, and although we have had different educations, she at the Jooss School and me with a Wigman student, I strongly felt aesthetically connected to her.

NH: Any criticisms?

SW: I am not a historian, and I don't really spend my days thinking about these things . . . These choric things could and they did become totalitarian somehow, but they were not started from that idea. It was a very different period . . . Naturally, sometimes when you see some work from that period you say, "Oh my God, what is this?" but I think they all departed from a very different state of mind. Working with big masses is something I must be cautious about, and I actually am. The danger is when big masses attain uniformity. Then you can take advantage of mass hysteria and manipulate people. Maybe there were certain people who felt fascinated by totalitarianism, but as an overall, I think that those artists did not have this frame of mind, and Wigman definitely belonged to this latter category. Then, if you also take the case of Gret Palucca, if someone sees how she developed the idea of movement in her school, I think it all refers to the freedom of expression. There were some beautiful things in the thirties, like movement in the nude, for example, that fascism "developed" in another direction.

Return to nature was used in the frame of an ideological distortion of the original idea.

NH: Since we spoke a lot about this city, let's end this talk with it: how does it influence your work, if at all?

SW: It does, and it has actually influenced my work a lot! I have worked in many different spaces, and this city has entered my sets and my concepts so many times . . . I always relate to certain spaces and confront myself with finding a way to respond choreographically to them. It pushes my way of thinking and influences me deeply.

Ballet/Tanz, October 2005

Angelin Preljocaj (1957-)

Angelin Preljocaj has been resident choreographer at the Choreographic Centre of Aix-en-Provence since 1996. Born in France, the child of Albanian political refugees, he studied dance there before continuing to the New York studio of Merce Cunningham. He has said that the exalted face of Rudolph Nureyev in a photo that a girlfriend showed him when he was young made him decide to get involved with dance. He says, "If one could be transformed so much through dance, then surely this art must have had a special power and be worthwhile." His dancing career began in 1982, when he joined the group of the late Dominique Bagouet, and soon his first choreographic work followed (1984). Preljocaj influenced the European scene a lot with the athletic, dynamic, yet lyrical and sometimes dark overtones of his works, and in our country, he has been extremely popular, especially because of *Trait d' Union*, the version of *Les Noces* (a tribute to the Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev), and his *Romeo and Juliet*, with backdrops by Enki Bilal.

NH: France considers itself a country friendly to immigrants, a country which can integrate foreign influences as well as difference with a certain success. What was your experience concerning the audience and the artistic community?

AP: I am a child of political refugees from Albania. My mother was pregnant with me when she arrived in France, so I was born on French soil, and this is important. The country welcomed me with generosity, I would say, and I agree that it is really a country friendly and welcoming to immigrants. I'm not saying that there is no racism, but on the institutional level, it was open to me, and my personal story is a positive example of the image that France has given about itself, as friendly and integrative as far as foreigners are concerned.

NH: Would you participate in a “Balkan” project or in a project that would aim at helping boost exchange between Greece and Albania?

A.P: Yes, and I find the idea very interesting. I hear that there are problems concerning accepting and integrating Albanian immigrants in Greece. I would gladly participate in something that would aim at improving the relations and the understanding between the two communities.

NH: Do you have a national identity, and if so, how is this mirrored in your work?

AP: Listen, on the one hand I carry the tradition of my ancestors, whose origins are from Albania, and on the other hand, I was, from the very beginning of my life, exposed to French culture. So I am a man between two traditions, between East and West. The way I construct my works, their “architecture”, is clearly related to the Cartesian, Western spirit. But there is another side within me, the other tradition, the Albanian one, with the instinct and the mystery, which also exists in my works.

NH: How do you handle the weight of such a large reputation? You are an artist who has not only contributed a lot to the very shaping of the dance scene in France, but you have also influenced many colleagues of yours outside the country as well.

AP: This is a very sensitive area! I am glad that I hear you say something like that; it moves me a lot. However, when I'm working, what solely interests me is understanding the actual reality, the issues of my time. It is my work which speaks for me, for what I feel. Creation is a tremendous need for me. Each time, I am only interested in the piece I am creating and in the movement, not fame. I only want to do the best I can, and I don't think of anything else, except for my passion for dance and movement.

NH: Continuing on my previous question, I would like you to tell me how someone like you, who has developed a distinctive

personal style, understands the creative process. That is, which part of it and in what extent does it remain a conscious process?

AP: What you are now asking me reminds me what preoccupied Marcel Duchamp as well concerning the analogy between instinct and reason in a work of art. For everyone, it is certainly different: some artists are more intellectual and others more instinctive in their way of approaching art. I think that these two elements coexist. They are within everyone universally. *Intellect and instinct*. Sometimes it just depends on how one looks at things. In the example of Duchamp, it is the side of the idea that is underlined, but in reality this is an artist whose work is primarily characterized by the instinctive approach. Therefore, I think that we should ask ourselves where the intellectual approach appears and when instinct intervenes in order to correct a sort of a doubt of the intellectual approach. This in turn, as a process, is based on passion.

NH: What has dance given you all these years?

AP: It has been supporting my life for about forty years now. It is continuously present and part of my daily life. I would not be here, I wouldn't be who I am, if I hadn't been involved with dance. I would have been a tramp, a thief, or other . .

NH: In your opinion, what have you brought to dance?

AP: I don't know! I have no idea! Really . . . Or rather, there is something: the Maison de la Danse in Aix. This, I can say, was done with my own efforts and will stay for the next generations of choreographers and dancers. This is what I give to dance. It was done with an architectural study with the sole aim of predicting and creating solutions specifically for dance. It is made *exclusively* for dancing.

NH: How did you decide to get involved with dance in the first place?

AP: Everybody asks me that. I am surprised! I think, though, that people should be asking me why *I remained* in dance. The

reason I started to dance is a simple thing: ever since I was little, I was very restless and overly energetic, and I needed to do some physical activity, so I did sports. The body occupied me from a very early age. Later, when I started to be interested in intellectual issues as well, I felt I wanted to unite the body with spirituality through art.

NH: Who or what has most influenced you?

AP: Painting. Contemporary art, literature, cinema . . . I sometimes work with artists from different fields on the occasion of a project—writers, musicians, set designers . . . Even with people who make comics, like Enki Bilal. I am interested in finding ways to bring into dance things that exist in other arts but dance hasn't yet approached.

NH: Your future plans?

AP: A project which will premiere in May 2007, in Cologne, and is a great honour for me, as it is a collaboration on a great composer, Stockhausen.

NH: Your biggest dream?

AP: To have a second life—to be reborn and become a painter. I love painting.

NH: What do you think is missing from the dance scene today?

AP: Nothing in a sense, yet, yes, there are many doors to open up, many fields to discover, many things to develop. Furthermore, we must understand that dance is a universal art, in the sense that it is essential and important, and this results from the obvious thing: we all have bodies. So dance must be finally recognized as one of the great and important arts and acquire the place it deserves.

NH: How do you start to choreograph: from an idea, music, or something else?

AP: Anything goes, even from the image of a child that I see running in the street. I have many ideas, many plans, that are often left in a drawer for years, until I find the right partner

with whom I shall be able to carry it out. "Partners for the road" are needed, a special "encounter" in order to create something.

NH: How do you work with your dancers?

AP: At the start, we improvise, and at some point, it stops and "structuring" of the piece starts. I begin to make its architecture. In other words the "writing" starts. It requires strength and intensity. I'm a perfectionist and maniac with what I do, so I would say that I'm probably very demanding on my dancers. I want them to share my desire, to be in the same state of mind as I am.

NH: What is your relationship with your audience?

AP: I want to obtain the best possible result; I seek the highest point of performance. I want to like the spectacle that I am going to show, first myself. This is my perspective, and this is how I work, not to please the audience. I see the whole process as a suggestion of some things to other human beings who share the same mood with me, who feel, who have been in similar situations.

To Vima, 15/7/2006

Via Katlehong Dance

A dance group has successfully showed work in many European festivals, is coming to Greece to perform. The group in question is the South Africans Via Katlehong Dance, with the work *Nkulukelo—Celebrating 10 years of freedom in South Africa*. The years that have passed since 1991, when apartheid was abolished, and since 1994, when the downhaul of the old flag of the country took place, as well as Nelson Mandela being awarded the Nobel Prize, possibly helped people worldwide to forget the many riots and murders, Stephen Biko, Soweto, and the Botha regime. However, these events are not forgotten by the inhabitants of South Africa, especially the population of the poorer areas of the cities, who despite living in deprived conditions, created a culture similar to that of hip hop, offering through music and dance an outlet to the young people and an alternative proposal to rising violence and crime. Its name is pantsula, and it is the main component of the works of Via Katlehong Dance. Dynamic and energetic, this group was created in 1996.

NH: What is the situation in dance in South Africa today?

VKD: Dance develops through all styles, including street dance and theatrical dance, but also from lessons in the communities or the dances preferred by high executives . . . All forms contribute to something.

NH: South African society is now considered a society which desires integration and unity. What are the opportunities but also the possible barriers faced by young blacks who want to embark on a professional dance career?

VKD: While there was still apartheid, we never had freedom of expression, equality between the sexes, the possibility to explore different religions or different arts and cultures. Now

South Africa is moving forward into the future, and many steps have been made within the last decade. Young blacks involved in the dance scene have many options, as this art develops very quickly, within the wider framework of the development of the country.

NH: Which part of the black population do you "represent" in your work?

VKD: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Pedi, and generally that part of the population who grew up on the streets of the South African cities and were exposed to the lifestyle of the streets, which became a recognizable culture called pantsula.

NH: What is your audience? In other words, to whom do you send your "messages", and what do you want to accomplish through your works, artistically speaking?

VKD: Our shows suit all ages and cultures, including those of different religions of humankind all over the planet. With our work, we want to show the audience the street culture that we have, and how the old bad energy is transformed into good energy through a style that entertains people. Then we want to continue to show to the world, wherever we appear, the art, culture, and athleticism of South Africa, and to mature learning about other countries and not just those in Africa. We want to get involved with cultural exchange programs and to show our aesthetic criteria through art; having said that, we shouldn't forget entertainment, which we consider very important.

NH: How and which part of your cultural heritage do you use?

VKD: We were left to be exposed to the lifestyle of our native land and to its strong roots—that is, of the country where our ancestors were born—without forgetting, though, that we are the new generation from the streets of Johannesburg and the region called Katlehong. We are linked to the rhythms of wildlife of South Africa and the places where it's still alive. Moreover, the dance rhythm *gumboots*, as one of the oldest

dance forms, has influenced and inspired the style of our music and dance.

NH: Do you have a certain political message?

VKD: Through the idioms of pantsula and gumboots, we manage to express the freedom of today's lifestyle and the joy we feel for this freedom which we gained after so many years of fighting.

NH: What does dance mean for you?

VKD: Dance is our life, our language, our food, our daily dreams. Of course, there is life outside dance: family and loved ones . . .

NH: How do you begin to choreograph: from an idea, some music, or something else?

VKD: Our work is influenced and inspired by our daily experiences. The title and subject matter are related to some real experience of ours.

NH: Do you work collectively to prepare a new work? Do you improvise or follow more strictly structured processes?

VKD: Everyone participates in the creative process, and we work with both ways—that is, sometimes with improvisation and sometimes with a more specific process.

NH: Your plans for the future?

VKD: We want to continue to be passionate about art and to become more responsible about educating and entertaining our audience, and most importantly, we want to remain in the art scene, making works that the people appreciate.

NH: What is your biggest dream?

VKD: To create dance academies for the pantsula style around the world!

NH: What is the relation between dance in South Africa and other African countries?

VKD: Cultures, rhythms, language, lifestyle, and music complement each other because there are too many things in common both in terms of experience and of dance.

NH: Finally, who or what has influenced you the most?

VKD: The South African history and the different lifestyles of different generations.

To Vima, 16/7/2006

Sonia Baptista (1973-)

What is happening in dance in Portugal is not well known outside the country. Sonia Baptista is a young artist with interesting collaborations who also received the Prize Ribeiro da Fonte in 1991, while still in the beginning of her career. She mostly choreographs soli, and she has presented her work worldwide, helping the audience to become acquainted with dance as it evolves in this country of South-Western Europe.

NH: What is the feeling of being alone onstage during an entire performance?

SB: I sometimes say to myself that I'm completely mad doing something like that, to be alone onstage. But I could not express in words the feeling it gives me . . . It makes me feel powerful yet fragile at the same time. That's how I could describe it.

NH: What are the key issues for an artist who dances solo?

SB: I think that both the problems and the reward are the same as with other artists doing group works, or at least with those who are passionate with what they do and want to do it in the best way possible.

NH: Why did you choose this kind of performance?

SB: It just happened! And I feel that it suits me a lot, that it is the right one for me.

NH: What are you trying to tell your audience with your works?

SB: I just tell a story, or rather, it is as if I give the audience a book where there are some blank pages and leave it to them complete the rest of the pages the way they want.

NH: How do you start your creative process?

SB: I start my works by writing texts, and then the rest follows. Movement comes in last.

NH: How do you manage to function simultaneously as a choreographer, director, and dancer as well as maintain the ability to judge the work they create?

SB: I would say that I'm lucky, because I always manage to judge myself, what I'm doing. I also think that very helpful in this process is not to take oneself too seriously . . .

NH: Biggest influences?

SB: Everything that has happened in my life, all the people I have met, everything that has happened to me, my experiences, what I've read, what I've seen, what I've learned! This is what has influenced me. The list is very long . . .

NH: What are the main features of modern dance in Portugal today?

SB: In a nutshell . . . I would say that dance and performance in Portugal exist in many and in very diverse forms. The artists are working hard to perfect their personal styles, and they are not afraid to explore new ideas and to experiment.

NH: Which, in your opinion, are the strong and which are the weak points in the contemporary dance scene today?

SB: From what I know about today's contemporary dance scene, I would say that through its people, it continues to evolve, to wonder about many issues, and to experiment and to deny stagnation. But then, the dividing line between strength and weakness is part of the process, isn't it?

NH: Your plans and your greatest desire?

SB: I just finished the creation and performance of a new work titled "*Subwoofer*", and now I just need some rest. What I want the most is to remain honest in what I do and to remain true to myself as well.

To Vima, 21/7/2006

Emanuel Gat (1969-)

Emanuel Gat, the next big thing in dance in Israel, initially studied music and was later found in the dance scene and in the group of Liat Dror & Nir Ben Gal. Although he has been choreographing for over a decade, he didn't found the Emanuel Gat Dance until 2004. Among the most ambitious and interesting of his works is the first piece from Schubert's song cycle *Winter Journey* and *The Rite of Spring*, music choreographed by many artists since the first version by Vaslav Nijinsky (1913).

NH: Do you think that today an Israeli artist, given also the political conjuncture, has to choose between feeling: militant, apologetic, extremist, or a romantic escapist?

EG: I don't think of my art as "Israeli" . . . I am influenced, of course, or become influenced, by what is happening in the place I live, but my work is in an entirely different sphere.

NH: Then where are you "situated" artistically right now?

EG: Right at the crossroads between having the tools to work and to figure out what I can do with them!

NH: Choreographing *The Rite of Spring*, you join the group of important artists who have choreographed this particular music of Stravinsky. What is your perspective concerning this legendary score?

EG: I find this context—that is, all these artists and productions—something very interesting but also very challenging. It furthermore makes me work on two parallel levels: one is the music, while the other includes everything it has inspired, everything that brings to mind, in short, all its myth. This creates a complex and multilayered creative process.

NH: How do you like Nijinsky's version of "The Rite"?

EG: It definitely is a great source of inspiration, and I think that what he did was incredible for that era.

NH: Which aspects of today's life today are addressed by a work like *The Rite of Spring*?

EG: "The Rite" is related to issues pertaining to gender relations, stereotyping we all meet, stereotypes recognizable in everyday life, which are themes familiar to all of us, which I would in a sense call "classic" . . . It also depends on the meaning of sacrifice as an idea, a viewpoint, and also with the group as a possibility, with death and, of course, with dance itself . . .

NH: Which of the previous versions has influenced you, if of course this is the case.

EG: I would say all of them and none of them . . .

NH: What is your perspective in "Winter Journey"?

EG: This is a completely different thing. It is a work that deals with what I would call "moderate": the possibilities of deconstruction and minimalism as methods for emotional and spiritual journeys.

NH: How did you decide to get into dance?

EG: After a seminar I attended only by chance, and for amateur dancers too!

NH: What do you want to bring to this art?

EG: What interests me above all is the confidence in dance as the basic material for choreography.

NH: How would you describe the dance scene in Israel today?

EG: Alive and dynamic!

NH: The biggest influences in your work?

EG: Everything: people I meet, things I see, all the arts, sports . . . and many more.

NH: How do you work with your dancers?

EG: I don't have a method; I work differently with each project. I like to surprise even myself and to let new things happen depending on the situation and on my colleagues. I would generally say that the way I work is a well-organized, intuitive, improvisational process.

NH: Your future plans?

EG: The Kiryat Gat Choreographic Centre will be used by the group for its productions and work but will promote, among other things, choreographic research. It will also promote artistic and educational programs and much more. It is the first centre of this type in Israel.

To Vima, 23/7/2006

Carmen Mota

Flamenco is the culture of song and dance of the gypsies, enriched by influences from Arabs, Jews, and the Spanish in the Andalusia region, where they settled in the thirteenth century after they fled from India. Divided into two large groups, the gypsies wandered for about two centuries before they settled down in the south of Spain. The first good years were followed with persecutions by the Inquisition, demonization, and marginalization. In their song, the cante flamenco, they expressed grief, anger, and poverty of the race. The more serious songs were not danced, and they were often performed without musical accompaniment, thus intensifying the drama. The golden age of flamenco came shortly after the mid-nineteenth century, with the Café Chantants, a time that signalled a shift toward professionalism while simultaneous emergence of a lightest style as the dominant preference of audiences. At that point, the commercialization started with the creation of the Opera Flamenca, a genre with loose structure and trivial subject matter. The shift to the old form of flamenco happened in the 1940s, while in the past two decades took place the most fervent efforts to update the genre, with influences from contemporary dance. Carmen Mota, collaborator of the famous flamenco artists Antonio, Lola Flores, and Carmen Amaya, belongs to the dancers and choreographers who sought ways to renew flamenco. She founded her group in 1977—Carmen Mota Dance Group—and she has since toured extensively abroad. Apart from the performances of her group, she has choreographed for major mass events such as the Olympic Games in Barcelona and the Millennium Festival in Berlin.

NH: How did you decide to get involved with flamenco?

CM: It is not something that I decided consciously. If I go back in time, what I can say is that I remember being constantly fascinated by flamenco.

NH: What have you kept from the tradition of flamenco and what did you change?

CM: I think we should keep our roots, the basis of flamenco. We can't change them! However, I believe in experimentation and renewal concerning the scenery, music, and new forms of dance expression . . . So what I do is try new things in the way I present flamenco, respecting though its principles.

NH: What is your vision for the future of flamenco?

CM: I see flamenco as a live art, open to today's stimuli and to influences and the renewal of the future, not only on an artistic but also on a technical level.

NH: The audience and the community of flamenco accepted easily the changes you made?

CM: Renewal often meets some obstacles at first, perhaps because the word "renewal" creates different connotations to different people. There is always a sort of disbelief about anything new, as well as fear that it will destroy the tradition of a culture, which in turn can create confusion, and eventually fear can lead to the loss of this culture!

NH: How would you define the duende, this decisive point in flamenco performances?

CM: "Duende" is the expression of the *flamenco feeling*, and it is something very characteristic in the flamenco culture.

NH: How does a performer arrives at the point to express duende onstage and be true every time he or she does it?

CM: I think that either "duende" is something you have or you have not. It's an inner feeling, rooted in a human being, such as the "swing" in other cultures, and it cannot be taught. The technique is what one learns, practices, and improves, and it is the means to express the duende.

NH: What do you want to express through your work?

CM: I try to show the personal interpretation of a tradition and of my culture as well, which is influenced by many years of

travelling around the world and exposure to different kinds of art.

NH: What do you want to bring to flamenco?

CM: I just want to develop this personal approach that I mentioned before, and I feel very happy to have had the opportunity to do it during my career, and I continue to do it.

NH: And finally, what exactly is "Fuego!", the project that you will present to the Greek audience?

CM: "Fuego" is an illusion and the opportunity to show on an international level my idea on performance. It is an idea developed on flamenco, which in turn is what I have and I carry within me, my environment, the past, and my "origin", seen though through my personal vision on theatre and performance.

To Vima, 2/9/2006

Janet Eilber (1951-)
(on Martha Graham)

Many groups closely associated to their founders dissolved after the founder's death, and the Martha Graham Dance Company faced a lot of strain after her death in 1991. Moreover, a lot has been written on its chances to recover and continue its course. However, all the problems that plagued the group seem to have been solved under the direction of Janet Eilber, a former dancer with the company, who has performed all the major roles that Graham had created for herself and will continue to present the late choreographer's work. A work which is divided into two major periods, the "American" (late 1920s to the late 1930s or early 1940s) and that of the "Greek myths" (from 1940s onwards). Graham was a woman who had an absolute sense of identity, in terms of gender, but also on an ethnic and artistic level, presented mainly through female figures of American and Greek "myths". In order to do it, she used the technique she devised and elaborated over the years, and which was based on the simple action of breathing and its effect on the human body. Provoking whole generations since 1960 to rebel against her works, after many monographs on her work and numerous tributes made, an autobiography, awards, and worldwide recognition to accompany her, Martha Graham (1894-1991), through her work and eighty years after the founding of her company, returns to fame, claiming new reading of her oeuvre and vindication.

NH: In her autobiography, Martha Graham says she was interested in the integration of different cultures and that despite the inspiration that she sought in the indigenous populations of Mexicans and Indians, her dances were not of "ethnic" character. How would you characterize her stance today as well as how the company operates in the aftermath of such a myth?

JE: I would say that the approach of Graham is very American and very personal as well. What is amazing in Martha is that underneath everything that she did, there are always the most basic human issues in primary form. That is before they become a "gender issue", "religion", "ethnicity" . . . Her work relates to everything that is common among people. So I think that she created right at the point where there is not prejudice *yet* or even a comment on the next level of the human condition—that is, the space where there is religion, race, differentiation between man and woman and so forth. This is important, and it is the reason her works communicate with people from all countries, all ages, for it contains elements that one recognizes immediately just by being a living being, before thought and intellect intervene. The way in which she incorporated the culture of indigenous people was not a comment on this culture, but she simply absorbed elements in order to deliver what she meant, figuratively. She did not judge the habits or the art of a people, but she was taking elements, and through her art, she attributed to them another global dimension.

NH: You knew her and had worked with her for a long time. Was she aware of her origins as for example Isadora Duncan was, that she was an American of Irish descent, and if yes, what did it mean for her?

JE: Graham was very, very American! She came from a very old Puritan community. Her family had been in America for many years. She was an American in the fact that she expressed the culture of the country at that time through her work. She was a genius at the right place and at the right time. American identity had been through a major crisis during the Civil War; there was also the memory of the older liberation wars that were a bit like the revolution of teenagers against their parents. Then it was the First World War. All these facts casted doubt as to "who I am" and "where I'm going." Martha was then in the years in which her character and ideas were shaped, and the United States emerged as a great power. But we didn't have

our own voice. We had a borrowed culture from different directions. And while America was in the process of finding its voice in the field of music, with jazz, Gershwin, Aaron Copeland, and others, and in theatre and photography and architecture, where the trend was to eliminate any decorative style and stick to a simple, direct one, similar to the behaviour and manner of speech of the people of the country, Martha Graham was the force that brought all this to dance.

NH: Interesting . . .

JE: Yes . . . Once, a great dancer and artist, Robert Kohan, said in a lecture that Graham was very American and that he felt this in a performance in Rangoon, in Burma, where the company—in the 1950s—danced beneath the largest pagoda, which was decorated with gold, her work titled "Errand into the Maze", a work based on the myth of Ariadne and the Minotaur. I asked him why, and he answered, "It was something that had to do with athleticism. In that country, where everything was so ornate, so detailed, and so decorative, Graham brought an image of a strong, athletic body, fully expressive of its individuality and strength."

NH: You worked with her a long time. How was she? Rumours have it that she was harsh . . .

JE: She could be anything she wanted at any moment . . . With my generation, she was warm and generous. Past generations may have suffered because her creativity stemmed from great personal strength. Then she had to also give away her roles when she grew older, to pass them on to other women, and that was difficult for her. She dressed them in ugly costumes . . . There are many stories that are told. However, when the turn of my generation came, I was told by my mother, "You are lucky because you are not her *daughters*; you are her *granddaughters*." So she rather spoiled us. Nonetheless, she could always transform into a real shrew! I was sometimes looking at her and found it incredible. But let's not forget that this was because she wanted something and knew that at that moment, that this was

the only way she could get it from a particular dancer. With other people, she could be different. She loved men and flirted shamelessly. She was a complex character, with acid humour, and she spoke softly and slowly. She could still be warm and very charming. I had the chance to dance at the White House the night she received the Medal of Freedom in 1976. As we were returning to the hotel after the event, she turned to me in the car and said, "You know what? As I was walking on the red carpet with the honorary escort between two rows of soldiers, all I was thinking was, "Ah, if only my mother could see me now." She was eighty-one years old then, and she was thinking like a little girl, like a much younger woman. This was Martha.

NH: In her book, she speaks a lot about her collapse after the divorce with Eric Hawkins. Was it really the great drama of her life?

JE: I don't think so! Everything in the life of Graham revolved around creation. There was nothing else. She had this wild desire to create; it was almost like a curse. She had a phrase that she had taken from the Brontë sisters, and she used it in order to describe itself: desire up to disaster. I don't think she had a choice in life. Maybe it was a kind of addiction. She could not live outside this context. It is amazing to think of her possibilities. She choreographed a work like "Acts of Light" at the age of eighty-six!

NH: Since you mentioned this work, how do you like the fact that there are many elements in her technique that remind one of ballet, despite the opposition between modern dance and ballet at the time? This is most evident in the works of the last period, such as "Acts of Light", for example.

JE: Two things may be said here: first, the technique has evolved over time, so it makes sense for any change to be more evident in the most recent works; second, her dancers, who came from all over the country, often had a classical education, and a very good one indeed, and she certainly took advantage of the fact that their legs could go higher, for example. So she took what

she liked and incorporated it in her technique, but the reason her technique still exists is that she incorporated in it things that she wanted to express. It is not a set of shapes for the sake of "shapes", but a form which resulted from emotional states of being, which she wanted to communicate. She created her technique based on the language of the human body, so often the movements take the form of basic, identifiable, primary forms.

NH: This is a criticism that has been heard: after a few years, this technique lost the "revolutionary" style of the first period.

JE: That is true. Everything changed: the bodies of the dancers, the times . . . I guess that's what happens with any kind of revolution, with any kind of revolt. The early years of the revolution lack in humour because you only want to make the world understand what you do and why you do it . . . So it was with Martha. Once she strengthened her position and began to develop thematically and technically, she relaxed a little.

NH: How has the audience changed over the years? How did they see you back, then and how do they see you now?

JE: This is an issue of paramount importance to me. I do not care just how they feel about the work of Martha Graham but also about the arts in general, because the stance of the audience has changed tremendously in this area. People plan their own artistic experiences nowadays. They play with their iPods, their TVs . . . it all started with the walkman that allowed people to design their own "art". Today we cannot tell the audience, "Come to the theatre to see what we shall offer to you." They want a deeper experience and a better understanding of what is happening. They want information; they want the reason why they need to sit in their seats and watch . . . Other arts have already tried to address this issue—for example, museums with audio tours of their sites. Opera also uses surtitles, but modern dance is a young art, so there is still a lot to be done. It also had precisely this mentality: "We must destroy the old; we must find new things." Now, after a century's life, it discovers that

it wants to salvage some things that survived over time and which seem to deserve to be saved. Therefore, dance has to mature more and find new ways to present the "new classics" and their works. Maybe we can borrow from the practice and experience of other arts in order to draw the audience into what we have to offer. In our company, we experiment with programs that are quite explanatory about what we are about to present. We show video footage with archive material and parts of the show, we talk to the audience before the show, we put the works in chronological order . . .

NH: In the future, are you planning to present solely works of Martha Graham or commissioned works as well, as does, for example, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?

JE: First we want to secure the work of Martha, to find new ways to bring the audience close to us, to make people acquire a relationship again with her work. Then I think we can add a "new wing" in our "museum"—this is an expression that makes many people angry, but I love it. I am thinking that works by artists whose approach somehow matches that of Graham would be a suitable choice—works of psychological depth, emotive, of high aesthetics, of artists such as Pina Bausch, Ohad Naharin, Mathew Bourne . . . The style may vary, but the important thing is to match what Martha called "inner field."

NH: Which of the works of Graham do you consider the most important ones?

JE: It's hard to say, but there are probably fifteen pieces which constitute the most important moments in her creative course. "Night Journey", for example, on the myth of Oedipus, changed the way in which everybody thought about stage time: everything happens within the seconds that elapse until the Jocasta has hanged herself. When the curtain opens, she catches the rope, and when it closes, she wraps it around her neck. It is a very complex work. One reason Martha chose the Greek myths to create her metaphors was that the audience

arrived already knowing a few things about the characters and the storyline, so she could freely "deviate" from them and present them as she wanted to.

NH: And the most important roles that you danced?

JE: Jocasta, the solo in "Lamentation", which was about the abstract expression and the shape of movement and of the costume of a deep emotional state; the woman pioneer in "Appalachian Spring", the Chorus in "Cave of the Heart", Jeanne d'Arc, Phaedra . . .

NH: The female groups, as shown in many works of Graham, show their "historicity" onstage nowadays. What do you say about that?

JE: Maybe, but I think it is a very powerful image that still works today, directly touching the viewer even. They are direct and dynamic. A huge physical power! People identify with an almost animal-like primal way to this picture. It is a power similar to what one sees in the horses at the races.

NH: What is ultimately the image of women in the work of Graham?

JE: In one sentence: women can accomplish anything, the good things and the bad things. When asked if she was one of the first feminists, Martha always replied, "No, I just always did what I wanted." She sacrificed a lot for this, but that was true.

To Vima, 17/9/2006

Tory Dobrin (1954-)

(on the Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo)

The Ballets Trockadero Monte Carlo (Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo) will be back in Athens to entertain its faithful audience once more.

Overturning stereotypes can be an annoying situation for the public. Even today that the dance has come out of the theatres and performances are hosted in the most unusual places, with even amateurs participating in performances, and has arrived at a point to have spectacles which lack anything that may traditionally be considered as dance, ballet, dancing sur pointes, is still considered the undisputed field of women. This attitude clearly does not apply to the Trocks, whose work is based on the "appropriation" by the men dancers of the company, the dancing sur pointes with tutus, in choreographies that have been identified in the long history of academic dance with the ballerinas. With the Trocks, together with extracts of renown ballets, one may see all the backstage competition, the legendary whims of big stars of the past revived, as well as their alleged effort to ensure the acquisition of powerful protectors. After all, "Les Sylphides" were in fact real women, with financial needs and active sexual lives in return . . . Tory Dobrin, artistic director of the company, did dance in the past some of the roles he now teaches to his dancers.

NH: How did you decide to become a dancer?

TD: I was never sure I wanted to be a dancer. I liked seeing dance performances when I was little, I started taking lessons and was good at it, and slowly dancing became a daily habit and routine. If I hadn't met the Trocks, I wouldn't have continued dancing.

NH: What stereotypes do you want to subvert with your works?

TD: What we say is that with a lot of hard work and a little talent, high-quality technique in dance can simply be mastered by any dancer. Dancing is beyond sex and gender roles. It's a bit like fighting against racism.

NH: Do you think that a group of dancers "en travesti" can sensitize the world on gender issues?

TD: This is the wrong name for our company. I would say that we are ballet dancers dancing both male and female roles. It has nothing to do with our sexual orientation. We are not interested at all in the sexual preferences of our dancers. The only gender issue that concerns us is our right to dance in whatever interests us.

NH: There may be some correlation with issues relating to the gay community . . .

TD: I'm the wrong person to answer this. I totally understand the need to establish a link between the gay community and in our main idea, which is to dance roles of both sexes. However, what we do, in reality, does not have the slightest connection with gay people or such issues. They have different priorities and issues from us. *All we want* is to give the audience high-quality dance, and we practice every day in order to succeed in this.

NH: Judging from your work, it is rather evident that you love ballet. What is it that ballet has and can successfully address to today's audience?

TD: It has style, drama, beauty, and good music, also offering a chance to relax.

NH: What fascinates you in the old stars and the ballerinas who had the rare title of *assoluta?*

TD: In earlier times, ballet was very glamorous and important. Today we have different priorities and forget the power of art on the human mind and lifestyle.

NH: Which are the incarnation of the ballerina "assoluta" for you?

TD: Anna Pavlova and Maya Plissetskaya.

NH: How difficult is it for the male dancers to work on the tips of their toes?

TD: It's a little difficult at first, but after practicing, it becomes a habit.

NH: What are your plans for the near future? A new production, a collaboration, touring?

TD: We shall continue our tour; we are planning new choreographies, and maybe a show in a large theatre, for many performances.

NH: How does the audience respond to the Trocks?

TD: The best is when you see in the audience families with young children laughing and enjoying the ballet. The worst is when people confuse our company with some gay militant group and come to protest against gay rights!

NH: How do you feel about the company?

TD: It's my family.

NH: What do your dancers do after the Trocks? When their careers are over?

TD: They are all permanent members of the company. They continue to do their work out and to work full time for the Trocks. Most of them continue either choreographing or teaching, as usually they stay with us until they retire.

NH: What can you tell us about the history of the Trocks?

TD: New York is a free city. In the seventies, we wanted to dance ballet in our own way, and we were feeling jealous that some wonderful pieces were reserved only for women. We wanted to dance them too, and being in a free city like New York, we were given the opportunity to create a group that suited our needs.

To Vima, November 2006

Heinz Spoerli (1940-)

The Ballet of the Opera of Zurich and "A Midsummer Night's Dream", by renowned choreographer Heinz Spoerli, will be hosted for four performances at the Athens Concert Hall. This is not the first time the Swiss choreographer will get involved with this Shakespearean play; in 1976, he made the first version of the erotic entanglement described in this popular play. A prolific choreographer who has made numerous choreographies, he has also successfully worked as director in big theatres and organizations in Germany and Switzerland. Aside from "A Midsummer Night's Dream", among his best works are *Wendung*, *Belle Vie*, *Thundermove*, and *Goldberg Variations*, while he has also choreographed important versions of works of both the classic and romantic repertory, such as "Giselle", "Coppelia", "The Nutcracker", and "Romeo and Juliet".

NH: You have been choreographing for many years. Have you ever felt fear about the possibility of a crisis in inspiration and creativity—a "writer's block"?

HS: So far, no. Furthermore, I have just started to prepare something new, so I would say that for the moment, everything is going well. We'll see later.

NH: How do you see the future of ballet?

HS: It's an art that will continue in the future. However, I think that for now it is threatened by modern dance, an art in which a lot is invested and in which we often find poor and insufficient education. Nevertheless, it attracts much more attention on the part of the state. So I could say that ballet is currently in a difficult position; it is an art form which is at risk.

NH: Nonetheless, many people say that when there are cuts in the funding for dance, the lion's share of what is left is given to ballet companies because ballet is considered the safest choice.

HS: This is not true! Modern dance usually needs less, as several times performances are merely the result of the work of a group of friends. They last for just a few days, often with dancers who have little education and fight with each other . . . It's an avalanche, a vicious circle all this, and it continues . . .

NH: What are your plans for the future?

HS: I am currently working on *Peer Gynt*, by Ibsen, with Grieg's music. It will premiere in the fall. Meanwhile, we are preparing for a tour in Asia and Europe. We always tour a lot.

NH: Do you have a dream or plan that has not yet come true?

HS: Yes . . . I would like to experiment with new works in which to use ballet technique, as always. I am not interested in the versions of the classics; I am interested in making a modern work using the classical technique.

NH: What feeling do you get from the fact that you are so well known, essentially a star, in your profession?

HS: Dance is my life. I live for dance and creating, and these are the only things that interest me. I am indifferent to stardom. I have a wonderful life with the audience and with my dancers, and I leave everything else to those who care about such things . . .

NH: How did you decide to become a dancer?

HS: I started at the age of sixteen, rather late for ballet. I saw a performance of *Swan Lake* and immediately decided that this was what I wanted to do! I started to take lessons, and things thereafter evolved. My parents were initially unflinching as to this choice because they believed that I wouldn't be able to make a living from this profession. But when they saw that I was doing well, they were happy too, especially my father, and they accepted it. They were happy that their child did something that he enjoyed and was successful at it.

NH: You have said a phrase which you have also put on your website on the Internet: "—best answer, is the best performance." What do you mean by that?

HS: I mean that a particular performance can be good or bad; it depends. Nonetheless, a professional should be excellent in whatever he does. End of story.

NH: Are you harsh with your dancers?

HS: I think I am demanding, yes. But this is normal for a ballet company. They have decided to be in this "world", and they must live up to their choice. Then of course, I deeply care about my dancers. I want them to be happy, to live good lives.

NH: What were the major influences?

HS: In the beginning, it was Balanchine. In my youth, he was at the peak of his career, but many others have influenced me as well. There are many artists that I admire from the whole spectrum of dance—Pina Bausch, for example . . . Painting is also very important to me.

NH: You begin to choreograph from a music score, are inspired by an idea, or . . . ?

HS: Most of the time I start from music. But I might also start from a situation, a subject matter, and then I research everything around it, like now with *Peer Gynt*, for which I read a lot.

NH: What was so compelling in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" that you got involved with the play?

HS: In "A Midsummer Night's Dream", one can find many different themes to develop. At first, there is the dream, a very strange dream, one of those that bring people who dreamed them into situations in which they don't know if they did see it or not. Then the experience of love is interesting, which in turn also becomes incredible for every one of the characters, with a lot of disarray and confusion taking place. It's a very complex story.

NH: Which moments in your career do you see as the best ones?

HS: This is easy! They are always moments with my dancers—moments of effort and magical moments. For example, there is a dancer who has now retired, and I still remember how wonderful her interpretation of her role was. I can remember so many similar moments . . .

NH: What is the central point in your work?

HS: I think it is music . . .

NH: You know, of course, the fear of people in the dance scene concerning the potentially "oppressive primacy" of music sometimes . . .

HS: Oh, no, no, it is not the case at all with me. I don't use sheet music. I don't subjugate dance to music. *I feel the music*; I choreograph it, and this is very different. What I do is fundamentally different from what you described.

NH: Before closing, could you say a few words about the foundation that you made in your name to help and support dancers through scholarships and so forth?

HS: You know, after working for quite some years in dance, one earns money which from a point onwards is not needed . . . This foundation is a way to secure some benefits for some artists and for me to return a part of what I gained from the art of dance.

To Vima, 7/1/2007

Hofesh Shechter (1975-)

Israeli choreographer Hofesh Schechter is one of the artists who form part of the new blood of the European scene. An award-winning artist and former dancer with the prestigious Batsheva Dance Company, Hofesh Schechter has something of the highly athletic style of the resident choreographer of the company, namely Ohad Naharin, transformed into a dynamic, personal vocabulary.

NH: Your itinerary in dance so far?

HS: I started dancing folk dances with a group in Israel at the age of twelve, so I got into the world of dance. At fifteen, I went to study at the Jerusalem Academy, and at the age of twenty, I joined Batsheva. Then I worked with various groups throughout Europe, the group of Yasmin Vardimon included, until I decided to create my own group.

NH: Why did you decide to get into dance, and how did you decide to turn to choreography?

HS: I decided to be involved with dance for two reasons: First, because I was attracted by its social aspect—that is, I liked to be able to do something with many other people in the studio . . . It was like going to a party! Second, working with my body gave me great satisfaction. Physical work. I had a sense of progress that affected all other aspects of my life. As for choreography, I was always curious to see how it is, and I waited for the right moment to do it. When of course I realized that the "right time" wouldn't come by itself, just like that, I simply started to choreograph. There is something in creation that is like rushing towards the unknown . . . It's a combination of something that scares me but which also gives energy. Like entering a dark room with a silly grin in your face . . .

NH: Which traditions do you follow, which are you trying to avoid, and which one could you not avoid even if you wanted to?

HS: We are talking about dance traditions, I guess . . . OK. I try to keep away from my mind questions such as this one. I naturally observe that something inside me pushes me to use the knowledge that I have gained and my memory when I choreograph, and I'm very influenced by things I see or have seen in my life. I believe that the different dance traditions are like many different languages, like words, so I use them when they are helpful, when they can help me say what I want to say, and when they are suitable for what I want to express. I think that it is in my nature to try to find new words, new proposals, that will best suit my needs. I would finally say that I'm not trying to avoid any tradition. If I did, if I tried to avoid a particular tradition, it is more than certain that this would appear in my work!

NH: How has the situation in your country—I mean, hostilities that have lasted for quite some time now with neighbouring countries, terrorist acts, and so forth—affected you, and also, do you know how it has affected people of your generation?

HS: I'm neither a politician nor an intellectual. I don't have the tools to understand how a political situation affects me, but I assume that this is done. I have, of course, the same feelings as everyone else when I am informed or when I am wrongly informed about an event or political issue, but this isn't something I carry with me in the studio as a purpose or duty.

NH: Is dance in Israel political?

HS: What I want to say here is that I wish Israeli politicians were asked this question as often as Israeli choreographers are, only in reverse: "Is the political scene in Israel today 'dancy'?"

NH: Your future plans?

HS: I continue the tour in Britain and the rest of Europe, and at the end of September, we shall be at Sadler's Wells in London. I will also work on a project with the Royal National Theatre

and Channel 4, and I have been invited to choreograph for the Scottish Dance Theatre and the Ballet of Berne. Many interesting things . . .

NH: Why did you decide to leave Israel and come to Europe?

HS: Hmm . . . this is a really long story. I'll tell you about it another time . . .

To Vima, 24/6/2007

Ohad Naharin (1952-)

Artistic director of the most famous dance company in Israel, namely the Batsheva Dance Company (founded 1964), from 1990 until 2003, Ohad Naharin was born into a family with artistic interests and even professional artists. He studied at Julliard and at the School of American Ballet. He remains resident choreographer of the company. Naharin, exuberant and with a distinctive choreographic style, is an artist whose works combine theatricality, athleticism, and at times a poetic mood. He made the Batsheva Dance Company famous, and his works form part of the repertory of the greatest dance companies. Naharin has won awards in his country, the United States, and France. He has named his own technical style "gaga".

NH: Let's take it from the beginning: how did you decide to do dance?

ON: Dancing amused me a lot, and then I just got stuck with it! Then the more I worked with it, the more I realized that I manage to renew myself on all levels. It has to do with the capacity for abstract thought, with pleasure, with the strength of my body and my mind, with the ability to interact with music, even with a sense of organizing my experiences. What I find in dance is endless . . .

NH: What are your influences?

ON: I don't know . . . It has a lot to do with listening and with being alert to the stimuli of the world, with painting, music, and reading, but the most important is the research I do with my dancers.

NH: Do you use improvisation in your choreography?

ON: Every day.

NH: For you, is choreography the work of someone who ultimately somehow imposes, we could say, his or her will or who solves problems together with your dancers?

ON: Absolutely, with the dancers. Their generosity and freedom help me a lot. And the fact that they are open. At the same time, though, sometimes there are limitations to the process, and it is there and then that I intervene. I shape the atmosphere of the piece, and the way we work, that we try things out, I call it *gaga*. It is a kinetic language that I created, and it requires that one is in touch with his or her ability to generate movement—by breaking habits and mannerisms with effort. The process is done every day, even when we are not in the phase of preparation of a project, so they are always ready.

NH: Your movement vocabulary is very intense. Do your dancers find it hard?

ON: Thank you. But we don't think in these terms. We say explosive, gentle, subdued, et cetera. We never say that a dance or a movement is hard. I do not allow my dancers to use that word.

NH: Are you conscious of the passing of time in connection with your creativity, for example?

ON: I have more awareness of space since that time. Anyway, concerning time, what I see is that things are getting better all the time. My colleagues and I all feel that we are in a period of progress. I'm lucky for that. If I look ahead of me, I must be an optimistic. In five years from now, I'll be in a better position than the one I am now. In this sense, I' m not worried about something. The truth is that I thought all that many times over, and I think that how one feels about time is related to the chances one has ahead of him and of the chance to discover more.

NH: What would you say to someone who asked you about the meaning of your works? Would you even bother to explain?

ON: Depends on the listener.

NH: If one comes bona fide . . .

ON: Coming in good faith, for me, is one who is smart and listens using his or her imagination. So I would say to this person, "Come to work together and then we'll talk."

NH: And if that person came and did all that, then what?

ON: Hmm . . . Well then, I might talk. Speech is very important. This is how I communicate with my colleagues anyway, with my dancers, how I explain to them what I want and how it should be done. But it is of paramount importance to me what is implied and is not clearly uttered. That's why I say it depends on the listener.

NH: What about your plans for the future?

ON: Thinking of the next five years, I would say that first I shall celebrate my sixtieth birthday. I might also have a child. I would like to try. This is what I want to do in the next five years from now.

NH: The situation in Israel which affects everyday life, fear, or anxiety, as you experience it with war or suicide bombers, does it reach your studio?

ON: It's definitely part of my social consciousness. But I never liked to do works in which a situation is precisely described as if it were a documentary in *National Geographic*. Or colourful ethnic pieces easy to consume. Having also this social consciousness, I must also say that Israel does not internationally monopolize stupidity. One may live in a "quiet" corner of the globe—Switzerland, for example—and subsist on violence from parents or teacher . . . There may be an innocent victim as well. I am free to criticize the mistakes, and I have a lot in common with people who live in peaceful places. In order not to lose my mind, I dance and I create.

NH: So do you add elements from this experience in your works?

ON: What I called social consciousness may be found in all my works. However, what interests me is movement. It comes first, and I'm not saying this in a sense of hierarchy; I'm saying it in regards to how one may watch my works. It is not the idea itself

but how it will be "translated" in a piece that interests me, and this has to do with composition and vocabulary.

NH: So there is a message in your works?

ON: What I'm saying is that we are more alike than different. I'm talking about the relationship between pain and pleasure, the great love for dance, the ability to laugh at ourselves. My works have nothing to do with religion, geography, borders, and other similar issues.

NH: Is there then a certain Jewish identity that permeates your work?

ON: It depends on the piece. There may be a Jewish gesture or music, but it is not something important. It just results from my upbringing. In another work, titled *Mamootot*, which is for nine dancers only, I have used Japanese music; and the themes in the piece are many, so we go back to what I said before: we're talking about movement and atmosphere, about space, about people and their relationship with art.

To Vima, 8/7/2007

Dominique Boivin (1952-)

Contemporary French dance—like many other European dance scenes—owes to the American tradition; and one of its best known representatives, Dominique Boivin, studied with Alwin Nikolais, the man who endorsed communication with the audience through the creation of optical illusions that later inspired groups such as Momix and Pilobolus. Boivin, who started dance at an early age, was bewitched by Carolyn Carlson and turned to contemporary dance after seeing her perform. He won his first award for choreography in 1978, in Bagnolet. The next year, having presented his work in Avignon, he left with a scholarship for the United States, where he studied with Lucinda Childs, Merce Cunningham, et al. During his artistic course, he collaborated with many artists such as Daniel Larrieu and Philippe Decouflé. His group, Beau Geste, in partnership with the group Nom de Nom, will present in Greece the work titled *Bonté Divine*. The starting point of this piece is the sad story of Pierre Abelard and Eloise.

NH: What are the pros and cons of being in the dance profession?

DB: To answer this question literally, I would say that I find it beneficial to keep in shape from a physical standpoint. Now, if we are dealing with the artistic part, I generally love artists, their ability to produce something real, mixing or combining incredible things. Studying dance with people whose work interested me made me turn to choreography. I continue to dance and choreograph out of an imitative mood so I can to belong to a family.

NH: How would you define your style?

DB: I have an obsession: to stay alert, so it is most likely, if I do have a style, that I remain as receptive as possible to what surrounds me, and I allow an internal alchemy to take place. I then

research it and give it the form of a spectacle. More literally, I would say that my style is to learn to combine situations, movements, and bodies, to enable them to communicate.

NH: What do you want to tell the audience that comes to see you?

DB: I have nothing in particular to say to them, because otherwise I would think I know something that the audience doesn't know, and I doubt it! I prefer to speak about me, about my questions, my feelings, my conflicts, my dreams, and I hope that they will understand, that all this will touch them, that they will be moved by what I give them. Nothing more . . . really.

NH: Do you find the taste of the audience sort of imposing itself on your desire to choreograph?

DB: As far as the taste of the audience, no one knows it. I am also convinced that there is not just one but many types of audiences. It is now possible for more and more to travel and go see different spectacles, which they will like or not. I don't believe that an artist needs to be appreciated by everyone. As for whether the audience imposes its will on an artist, I think that television is more dangerous, because it is direct and very close to us, in the kitchen, in the living room, and even in the bedrooms.

NH: Is it pressurizing for an artist, all the responsibilities set by institutions in order, for example, to fund his or her work?

DB: From the moment that the artists, the groups, are taking from the taxpayers' money, it is perfectly normal to have control from the organizations responsible for the allocation of that money. On the other hand, as art is completely subjective, it seems difficult for one to decide who will be funded and who will not.

NH: Who or what has influenced your work?

DB: I have influences from artists whom I admired or admire, from exhibitions, performances, concerts, and books, which remain very important in my life. They were my spiritual guidance, and they always put me in the mood to create, to invent things. I recognize in them a vitality, a talent, a spirit that I try to understand and assimilate.

NH: How do you start choreographing?

DB: Always by intuition. I try to listen to my intuition as much as possible and to develop it through the work with the dancers. I often work with a group of dancers with whom I feel good sharing things and creating. Thanks to them, I evolve.

NH: What are the topics that interest you the most?

DB: I believe that they are my feelings, what I feel on a deeper level, even if they are very personal. In any case, if these feelings are sincere, I have the chance to be heard and understood by the audience. I have to make them readable and try to make them universal.

NH: Your plans for the future?

DB: I have many plans, but what I have already started to work on is a choreography with two or three excavators and dancers. This is done in collaboration with the Paris Opera.

NH: What is the situation of dance in France today?

DB: There are many talented choreographers in France today. I have absolute confidence in the next generation, that it will make the previous ones wake up, something that is always necessary. They just need a boost to overcome administration, the old planners, and the academism of the various institutions.

NH: In your opinion, which has been the most decisive moment for dance?

DB: I can only speak for France, and I is the moment that politics understood that art is necessary for the whole society. Art pushes ideas forward, moves things, and refreshes people. But when money dominates the creative minds, then we risk having conventional or "academic" works of art.

NH: Tell me one big dream that is still unattainable.

DB: To feel inside me that I created a work of vital importance for me, and which luckily met the expectations of many people.

To Vima, 11/7/2007

Koen Augustijnen (1967-)

Les Ballets C de la B (Ballets Contemporains de la Belgique), the group founded by the Belgian Alain Plattel in 1984, is now connected with Koen Augustijnen, who began his collaboration with the group in 1991, first as dancer, and since the late 1990s, as a choreographer. Having studied history and theatre, he has also attended seminars with artists such as Wim Vandekeybus, Suzanne Linke, Min Tanaka and Laurie Booth. The cornerstone of the works of Koen Augustijnen is theatricality but also an interest in the social issues of his time. Some of his works are *Crush Time, Plage Tattoo, Just another Landscape for some juke box-money*, and *Bâche*.

NH: How would you describe the style of your works?

KA: I think it has the elements of many things: it's rough, energetic, and sometimes melancholic. It is a dance theatre that speaks of the human condition.

NH: How did it end up in this particular form?

KA: I danced for eight years in projects by Alain Platel and other choreographers. Then I started to create small pieces—for example, trios and quartets which mainly spoke about lost love or the lack of love. At some point, I made a piece for six men, titled *Bâche*. And after seeing the fear around me and within me, I began a work on fear and about where it comes from. My last piece, *Import Export*, is more political, I would say. In it, I talk about the feeling of weakness vis-à-vis injustice in the world and especially concerning the exploitation of the Third World by the West. There is, in addition, the issue of feeling weak in a relationship between two people, which is another, different side of this issue.

NH: So you think that you are political and your works are politicized?

KA: Yes, definitely.

NH: Is the dance in Belgium politicized today, and if so, which are the main issues that the choreographers feel preoccupied with?

CA: One part of the dance scene is. The fact that many choreographers collaborate with dancers from different parts of the world is already a kind of statement in itself. There are no frontiers. Nationality is not important. Only talent and soul are important. Alain Platel burned an American flag in his work titled *Wolf*. Jan Fabr started *Je suis sang*, saying that although we are in the twenty-first century, we still live in the Middle Ages. I'm trying to say something about exploitation, perhaps in a more indirect way.

NH: How did you decide to get involved with dance?

KA: I was lucky. I went with a friend of mine to an audition. It was for the group of Wim Vandekeybus. He chose me for a workshop, and then a whole world opened up before me.

NH: Which do you think are the dominant ideas or forces that shape dance at this time?

KA: Dance is a young art and very lively. Today it is interwoven with other kinds of contemporary art, theatre, cinema, circus, video, performance art, visual art . . . There are no limits and old rules to burden us. We are free to invent new forms. That's how I see it.

NH: How do you start to choreograph?

KA: I start with a very clear and simple goal or an idea, and I let the dancers improvise and play with this idea.

NH: Could you say a little about the influences that shaped you as an artist?

KA: The Ballets C de la B; Pina Bausch, of course; Japanese Butoh; several Belgian choreographers; and many more that would take too long to talk about.

NH: For you, is choreography a collective or an individual "activity"?

KA: For me, it can be both.

NH: Upon which topics would you like to make your audience focus?

KA: I would like to draw attention to how far too many people are suffering in the world, in addition to the lack of solidarity that I observe.

NH: what are your plans for the future?

KA: This summer I will go to Palestine to give a seminar to Palestinian dancers, as they cannot get out of their country. I shall also be touring and showing *Import Export*, until March 2008. And the last plan for the near future is to start a new work, which I predict will comprise, together with the previous two, a trilogy.

To Vima, 21/7/2007

Akram Khan (1974-)

Akram Khan is a dancer who not only impresses with his dance technique but who also created a type of modern dance, a "fusion", with equal doses of Indian (Kathak) and Western styles. A Bangladeshi Muslim, Khan was born in England and managed to give the audience an image of non-Western dance away from the exotic, decorative model that had been created by the colonial fantasies of the former British Empire. He founded his dance company in 2004, and prior to that, he studied at De Momfort University and at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. He has won many prizes and awards, and his duet titled *Sacred Monsters*, with Sylvie Guillem, changed the stereotypes about the relationship of ballet and contemporary dance.

NH: Does your cooperation with Sylvie Guillem signal a change of direction in your career?

AK: I tend to consider myself a director, someone who doesn't care so much about the differences but mainly about the similarities. *Sacred Monsters* is a good example of this issue. This piece was a big challenge because Sylvie and I look quite different. However, something unites us, and we actually have a lot in common: our devotion to dance, determination, intolerance, ability to have a vision. These, however, are not enough to mark a change in my career. They are just an excuse for me to learn and to exchange knowledge and experience.

NH: Some people believe that it is "dangerous" for a contemporary choreographer to choreograph works for a classical dancer. What would you answer to that?

AK: All partners must share the same vision. Of course, each one has something different to contribute, but I do need their sincere

support. This is also apparent in our discussions, in our living together. It's a bit like marriage. You don't know the other very well at first, but you must have great understanding that will allow you to get to know him or her on a deeper level, since for the next two years you may be touring the world together!

NH: Does this cooperation mean that you might now want to come in contact with a different audience? In other words, are you becoming "mainstream"?

AK: In the work, in a duet, "difference" is dominating. We chase each other; we jump and face each other technically and stylistically. This is also visually evident as the classical education of Sylvie pushes her upwards towards the sky, while my years in Kathak push me more towards the earth. On the other hand, in another duet, our differences are smoothed as we dance holding one another, mirroring our movements. Our bodies become one; we are a new, unusual being. That's all I have to say.

NH: What prompted you to this collaboration apart from the fact that Sylvie Guillem is beautiful, a great dancer, and famous?

AK: I had seen Sylvie earlier on the screen, and as always, her artistic desire and her ability to get deeply into the role that she interprets impressed me. However, after I saw her live, I felt I was seeing a dancing being who was beyond any human dimension. I felt that I was seeing the spirit of perfection. So when we were rehearsing things for *Sacred Monsters*, I tried to expose her flaws in order to relate to her, to identify with her, so it was no longer Sylvie Guillem whom I had seen before in the live performances that impressed me so much. To me, an artist is stronger onstage when that person sometimes shows his or her most vulnerable moments.

NH: What you want to say with your work today?

AK: Kathak is my main source of inspiration and my main influence. The essence of Kathak is to tell stories through music, speech, and movement. The energy and the rhythm are among the

most important elements in Kathak, which are used in order to recount stories from the Indian mythology and the Islamic religion. Kathak is the cornerstone of my inspiration in the works of contemporary dance that I create.

NH: What role does experimentation play in your work? Are you still interested in it?

AK: I first react to things. I like the images or the ideas or even a smell, a colour, or a movement . . . Then I start to analyse . . . I feel first, and I think later . . . I'm inspired even from my meetings with different people . . . This is the sort of experimentation applicable to my work.

NH: Tell me about your identity and position in dance in relation to your origin, your style, and your recent artistic choices.

AK: Many consider my works abstract. Strangely, I always felt that my works were very specific. I think that this is immediately obvious and recognizable in my work. *Kaash* was most suggestive, *Ma* had a more narrative structure, and *Sacred Monsters* is clearly a narrative work.

NH: Your plans for the future?

AK: My only plans are my next performance with Juliette Binoche, which constitutes the third part of a trilogy; touring with my group, the name of which is Zero Degrees; and *Sacred Monsters*.

To Vima, 31/10/2007

Frederic Flamand (1946-)

Choreographer Frederic Flamand, director of the National Ballet of Marseille, has a long career in dance: in 1973 he created Plan K in Brussels, a workshop from which artists like the Joy Division, Marie Chouinard, William Burroughs, Eurythmics, Philippe Decoufle, Bob Wilson, and more left their marks. His experiments with space in which the movement of the body is inscribed brought him to the next step and his cooperation in various projects with Zaha Hadid, Ricardo Scofidio, Jean Nouvel, Dominique Perrau, and the Cabana brothers. In 1992, he renamed the Royal Ballet of Wallonia in Charleroi/Danses, and since 2004, he has been in charge of the N. B.M.

NH: Did Plan K aim at being an equivalent of the American Factory?

FF: No, because every project is different, as it is associated exclusively with the particular vision of its creator. Perhaps vaguely, so much so that ultimately it doesn't matter if there is a connection or not.

NH: What was behind the very concept of it?

FF: Well, at that time, Belgium was a very important place in terms of the dynamics of artistic creation. It was a region of Europe that was full of vitality. It was very close to Germany, France, Holland, and England, so it was easy for it to become a centre for the exchange of ideas because one could very easily travel to and from Belgium and to other important destinations. I rented an old sugar factory; can you imagine that at that time, it was easy and cheap to rent a factory? We tried to live in utopia there.

NH: Something like the sixties slogan "imagination to power"?

FF: Yes! A community of artists who lived, created, and experimented a lot. Everything was very idyllic and creative. Many artists who later became known, like the Eurythmics, started there, but others of an older age, like William Burroughs, also visited our space.

NH: You have been very much involved with architecture, body, and space. How interested are you, even today, in this research?

FF: Yes, I am still interested, and I have extensively dealt with this subject in my works. I recently collaborated with two architects from Brazil who create using recyclable, inexpensive materials as prima mater. I have tried many alternative "solutions" concerning movement in space, and I have taken the body out from the, predicable space in which it is expected to move. I would say that today I am more interested in that we don't have one but many bodies: the physical body, the virtual body, and so forth. The body is the most important element that we have, but it is very fragile, and therein lies its fascination. It is incomparable to any machine, and it can move, it can create emotions in a way that no machine will ever do.

NH: Naming your company Charleroi—Danse, you made a political statement. How political are you today?

FF: Of course! Especially now, we need to be more active citizens and more alert, as our freedom seems to be threatened on many different levels.

NH: Do you think that art, particularly through its experimentations on alternative forms of creation, presentation, et cetera, can somehow affect the world we live in?

FF: I'm not naive, and I'll say that directly no, it cannot do this. But we do procure people with many stimuli. They do perceive difference and reflection upon different issues, and this affects them from within. Therefore, in this sense, I would answer yes to your question.

NH: What is your starting point for a choreography? An idea, an image, a sound . . . what?

FF: Always a concept. Always! We then improvise a lot because the dancers are not obedient machines; they are people with interesting experiences that can enrich the entire process. Then the musicians and other partners join in as well. In regards to architecture, I would like to add that I don't care in any decorative aspect, but as a "fellow traveller".

NH: Marseille is a city of the South. How does it act on your inspiration?

FF: The South has the sun and the magic of the myth of the Mediterranean as well as its proximity to Africa, the history of civilizations that existed there. I like it very much. Sometimes, though, I miss the North. This is where I come from anyway. But I love the city, and I'm used to travelling a lot and to changing places of residence.

NH: Your plans for the future?

FF: What interests me and what I try to do is mix classical style with modern dance, and to the work that we shall present in Athens there are already certain elements of this direction. The Ballet of Marseille is largely of classic orientation, and the successful meeting of two different genres is a big challenge for me.

To Vima, 1/7/2008

Vera Mantero (1966-)

Vera Mantero was the main representative of the Portuguese dance in the 1990s. A skilled dancer, she started with ballet, which she later abandoned in favour of a stage form with more expressive possibilities which furthermore contained music, speech, motion, and intense theatricality. She remains a choreographer whom the European scene of contemporary dance considers an asset.

NH: How would you describe your style as well as how it evolved in the past few years? VM: I'm not sure I have a "style". Style usually means that there is something that is easily recognizable in one's work—and from one work to the next. I think my works differ enormously from one another. In any case, though, their common features are humour, irony, and a sense of the "irrational". In addition, I don't exclusively rely on movement to express myself, but I also props, voice, text, gestures, facial expressions, and so on. I like to push something to its limits, either dance, as I did in "Perhaps she could dance first and think afterwards"; or chaos, as in "Poetry and Savagery"; or the handling of language and communication, as the work that we shall present to the Greek audience very soon.

NH: What are your main influences?

VM: Release technique, improvisation, and complex forms that combine elements from many domains, such as dance theatre. Plus poetry and philosophy and the movements of the SURREALISTS and DADAISTS.

NH: How do you handle the issue of meaning and abstraction in your work?

VM: I have the impression that I deal only with meaning and not at all with abstraction. I think there are moments in my works

in which meaning is not accessible, but these moments are not the result of abstraction; they simply result from a subject that preoccupied my thoughts during the creation of the piece.

NH: How do you incorporate theatre into your work?

VM: I would not say that I incorporate it, because that would mean that it is situated somewhere outside the work. The use of other arts than dance itself came from my education and my thinking around ways that would allow me to use them in my work and in the creative process. It has also to do with my need to find ways to make dance "say" more than it can by itself. I "steal" the expressive ability of other arts to strengthen that of dance . . .

NH: Talk to me about one of your works.

VM: I can say that the piece "Until the moment when God is destroyed by the extreme exercise of beauty" is danced through words. It is an enormous research on speech, as it is enunciated by six people simultaneously, so we play with sound and meaning. In terms of content, we tackle issues such as what is a group of people, what is an individual, what it means to be together or not, to be the same or different. In this same piece, there is no conventional narration, and behind the performers onstage, there is a meteorite. Was it finally responsible for the lack of formal linearity in thought and speech?

NH: How do you start to choreograph?

VM: Usually from some questions and issues that I myself would like to be answered or at least expressed. I don't have images or other material in advance. Material is given to me by my colleagues, their experiences and their own personal worlds.

NH: Your plans for the future?

VM: I'm doing a piece for the Montpellier Dance Festival 2009, with working title "Ash Manoeuvres". I shall participate in the work of Alain Buffard, "Not a Love Song", and from September onwards I shall work in the revival of "Parades and Changes", a piece of 1965 by Anna Halprin, which will be presented at

the Lyon Biennialle. Finally, I'm writing a book. I don't know when it will be published, but it will contain text and notes of the last twenty years. It is exciting to look at all this material again.

To Vima, 18/7/2008

Jonathan Burrows (1960-)

British artist Jonathan Burrows was the enfant terrible of dance, as he made the gigantic transition and went from the Royal Ballet to contemporary dance, and even more so, on the part of choreography. His style is subtle, elaborate and with great musicality, ranking him among the great artists of our time. He has won awards and has choreographed for groups such as Extemporary Dance Theatre, Spiral Dance Company, Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, and the Royal Ballet Choreographic Group. In 1988, he founded his own group, which was resident at the PLACE Theatre (1992-94). He has taught and worked with many groups, organizations, and artists, and in 2004 Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion received the New York Dance and Performance Bessie Award for their *Both Sitting Duet*.

NH: How has your style evolved over the years?

JB: I studied for a while with composer Kevin Volans. He was helping me with ways to think about composition, and we looked at both music and dance as sources for the study. One of the things he said to me, and that stuck in my mind, was that it was best, perhaps, not to think too much about style. This doesn't mean that there isn't such a thing as style, but that style is what happens when you're not looking. Style is usually a happy accident of working, visible to other people, but if you go looking for it, you usually get nothing.

NH: Why did you give up your position as a dancer at the Royal Ballet?

JB: Well, I'd been a dancer with the Royal Ballet for thirteen years, so I'd had a long experience with that kind of dance work. I wanted to do something different. I'd always had connections with contemporary dance; in fact, I'd been performing for

many years already with experimental choreographer Rosemary Butcher. But also I'd made a piece called *Stoics*. They invited it to be performed in a few places in Europe, and the Royal Ballet wouldn't give us leave to go, so it was either stay and give up this chance or leave and try to find a new pathway for myself.

NH: How would you characterize your overall style?

JB: Someone else could answer that question better than I could. What I want to think happens may not be what somebody else sees.

NH: What are you researching in dance?

JB: Right now, I've been interested in looking at how to combine my love of formal things with my interest in finding new approaches to performing, and to the relationship with the audience.

NH: How far can you stretch the term dance?

JB: I work with movement a lot of the time, and that feels like dancing. At the same time, I agree with choreographer Jérôme Bel, who says that choreography is not necessarily the same thing as dancing. Choreography is about manipulating events in time and space. It's one of the greatest qualities of dance as an art form that it's so willing to explore what this might mean in terms of dancing but also in a wider sense. It keeps the form very experimental in a marvellous way.

NH: What would you consider your basic influences?

JB: There are so many, but I would single out the following things as being very important to me: the study I did with Kevin Volans; my work with composer Matteo Fargion; the work of Merce Cunningham and John Cage; the generation of the Judson Church pioneers who came to London in the late 70s; the whole conceptual movement in dance of recent years, and the way in which it has thrown out a challenge about how a dance might be read and how it could relate to its audience and the larger world; the dour, matter-of-fact quality of performances by the Bampton Morris Men—a dance that

takes place once a year on Whit Monday in a village near Oxford; my love of reggae and particularly the great UK dub DJ and producer Jah Shaka; and poetry, which I read a lot of.

NH: How do you deal with meaning and abstraction when you choreograph?

JB: I understand why some dance is called abstract, but I've never really had such an issue about it. I've cried in a Merce Cunningham performance. I make things that could be called abstract on one level, and at the same time, I'm never abstract when I perform them. I think the presence of the performer is everything; it can establish a very human interaction with the audience in even the most formal of contexts.

NH: Where do you stand in relation to the tradition of contemporary dance in Britain?

JB: I grew up with the contemporary dance scene in Britain and performed with Rosemary Butcher on and off from 1986 to 1999, so it is a part of me. At the same time, I work elsewhere more often than I work in Britain, so I deal with a slightly different context for myself now than just that scene.

NH: What is the piece that you will present in Greece?

JB: Matteo Fargion and I will present *Both Sitting Duet*, the first part of a trilogy of duets we have made and perform together. *Both Sitting Duet* was made in 2002, and was followed it in 2005 and 2006 with *The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance*. We have given over 170 performances of these pieces now, in twenty-three countries. *Both Sitting Duet* is a forty-five-minute-long silent piece in which we translate a piece of music by American composer Morton Feldman from notes into gestures. People often say that they "hear" music despite the silence, so by accident the performance deals somehow with a sensory confusion. It can also be funny in parts, but this depends on our mood and the mood of the audience. We have a few principles for performing which open up the formality. The first is "How the audience is sitting is how we sit", which

means that if you're relaxed, we relax, and if you want to sit tight and concentrate, then that's what we will do too. The other big principles are "How we feel is how we behave", which means we laugh if it's funny and allow ourselves to be self-conscious if that's how we feel, and finally, "There are no mistakes".

NH: Do you like to shock or surprise or provoke your audiences?

JB: No, I hate being in front of a performer who thinks I need to be shocked or provoked. I'd rather have a conversation.

NH: What is your starting point for a choreography?

JB: Matteo and I tend to start with what we call "unfinished business". This means the things we've always wanted to do that we think we shouldn't do, but which won't go away. Eventually, we give in and do them. We then try to find a principle to tell us how to begin. Our principle for *Both Sitting Duet* was "Counterpoint assumes a love between the parts". This principle led us to find ways to share time that allowed us to be completely in the moment and at the same time give it all up to the other person. In the end, the duets are about the fact that Matteo and I have been friends for many years; this is the subject that comes up most obviously amidst all the counting and arm waving. And this subject was hidden there in the first principle—that this sharing of time is an act of love.

NH: What would you consider the ideal relationship between dance and financing?

JB: Matteo and I have struggled to fit into the political agendas that control arts funding in the UK. We travel a lot abroad to show our work, but we get no funding from the UK for infrastructure. We've solved this by having no office and administrating the touring ourselves, rehearsing meanwhile in Matteo's kitchen. Therefore, I've stopped thinking about the ideal situation. I try to focus instead on ways to keep going anyway.

NH: Your plans for the future?

JB: I never know what I'm going to do next. Right now, I haven't started work on anything new since the last duet with Matteo, but I will when the right time comes and I feel driven enough towards something.

To Vima, 22/7/2008

Gerda König (1966-)

Gerda König studied psychology and became interested in dance in 1991. At first, she collaborated with the group Mobiaki and Paradox Dance Company and then founded her own group, called DIN A 13, in 1995. The group, which is one of the very few ones whose performers are both with and without disabilities all over the world, has done many projects and has successfully carried out exchanges and given performances in many parts around the globe. In 2005, Gerda König initiated the program "Dance meets differences", through which she helped set up mixed groups in other parts of the world as well.

NH: How did you decide to get involved with dance, especially with a group of mixed dancers with and without disabilities?

GK: I was studying psychology, and I had a friend who had studied dance in Amsterdam. I visited her there, and then I went to a seminar in Cologne, done by Alito Alessi, one of the pioneers in the choreography of mixed groups of people with and without disabilities. I was interested in something like that because it was something very rare; there was essentially nothing relevant for people with kinetic problems. Moreover, this was art! It was an amazing experience for me, this workshop with Alito. It was the first time I saw dance for mixed groups, and the dance idiom that he used was contact improvisation. There were almost sixty people there—and of course dancers in wheelchairs, who had already had some training. I remember that there was a woman with spastic paralysis, which is a difficult condition. Alito spoke with her and worked with her, and they finally found a movement appropriate to her own pace and quality. Later on in the same workshop, that woman developed an interesting, almost incredible kinetic

material. I had so many questions: Can everyone move like this? What is beauty . . . and what is dance . . . ? The weekend after the seminar was a scheduled show with Alito and Emery (Blackwell), the tetraplegic collaborator of Alito. This was the first time I saw a performance in which people with and without kinetic problems participated, and it was tremendous in terms of a mind-opening experience. Suddenly I saw that there were two professional dancers onstage. I wasn't seeing the differences; it was incredible! Everything changed in me: my ideas about dance, about beauty, about professionalism. Personally, I can say that until then, I had internalized all social stereotypes and prejudices about disability, and suddenly everything was overturned. So I decided that this was the medium I wanted to use; this was the means I wanted to work with. So I started to learn more about this art, to detect the possibilities that it could give me. At that time, there was a group in Cologne called Mobiaki, with people with disabilities, and generally it was a time when there were not so many similar groups in Europe. So I was lucky to have something like that in my own town. I saw their performances. I stayed three years with them, until I also finished my studies. I learned things, and there was much that I wanted and needed to know as well: dance, lights, music . . . The Mobiaki group was known in the field of people with disabilities, and they were invited to many countries for projects involving people with disabilities. Eventually, I went to Rio for research, and the group disbanded. They were already many years together, and at some point, everyone went another direction. I wanted to continue. I searched for musicians and dancers, not knowing which way to go and whom to turn to. At some point, we started rehearsals. We were improvising . . . One Saturday a month, we were getting together, and from our improvisation, we found new material. Everyone offered and everyone participated; we operated as a team. The field of movement was enormous, and I definitely wanted to find new material.

NH: Were the next steps easier?

G.K.: Yes and no. Slowly, thirteen people were meeting steadily once a week, and eventually, half a year later, there was a festival in Cologne. We participated with a small show. This was our first choreography. Nobody had shown anything similar before. We were lucky to have invited Elizabeth Clarke, one of the first dancers of Pina Bausch, and she came to see the piece and make some comments on it. After the presentation, everyone was talking about it. Among other things, Elizabeth told us, "From my experience with art and dance, all I can say is that there is no democracy." I understood what she meant; she'd said something that I wanted to say. On the other hand, she asked questions regarding the piece, which helped clarify things, asking what the feeling was in certain parts of the work, why we didn't show it, and so forth. This was the first step, and it clarified many things for me. At the festival, the opinions were that our piece was provocative, and most of the comments were negative. They sort of said that we shouldn't show what we showed . . . We got some good reviews too, of course, which stated that our work was the best of the festival, and this gave me the strength to continue.

NH: So you went into a more professional phase . . .

Yes, and our second project was a duet, which we were still performing up to four years ago! Meanwhile, everything was done without money. You first have to show work to get good reviews, become somewhat known to people, and then search for sponsors and funding. Three whole years passed without money, although there was a little help for things like costumes for the performances. I received the first significant sum of money from Kunststiftung, and this was the basis for the subsequent development. I could then do auditions to find dancers. I could pay people; I could afford to have space and all that. After that, I did a production every year. We went further and higher every year. We became known and beloved; we became popular. However, I can't forget that initially I faced snobbery: *What are you doing here?* It was a battle against

prejudice and a fight for the money necessary to survive. But all this made me make another important decision, that I would not only participate, or would consider the company suitable only for projects on disability. I did not want us to have a limiting identity. What we did was dance, and this is how they saw us.

NH: What was your vision on dance? What did you want to bring to this art?

GK: My vision, really, was to bring a different quality to dance, another style. The result of this attitude was to invite us to dance festivals in many countries, festivals in which we participated like the rest of the other groups. But I would like to have our group even more established in the minds of the people.

NH: Tell me about your project in Kenya and Brazil; Africa, which for many is a lost cause; and Latin America, with the complex political and cultural history.

GK: I went with my group and worked there with dancers with and without disabilities. I think that I showed what it is like to work with them, the experience but also the method to do it. A mixed group of dancers and extremely interesting material came out of this. In these countries, there were rather strong social taboos existing. There were also big cultural differences. I didn't go with something ready and set, because I was interested in exchange, especially with all these differences: I, with my own past and history, coming from Cologne, opposite to the challenge of creating in such different environments. Kenya is not the only African country in which we worked. We also went to South Africa in 2004, for the Jubilee of Dance Umbrella (its twenty years). We also went to Ethiopia, where we made a piece for three dancers, and Ghana. This year, we're going to Senegal. You said something before about "lost cause." Africa, for me, is not even close to that description.

NH: But it is different . . .

GK: Yes, there are huge differences. There are differences even among different African countries—and often significant ones. Each country has its own history and culture, which clearly differs from our own. Kenya, Nairobi, had a sense of depression. It is a dangerous place, full of crime, and we would only commute in taxis. We were white, "with money", so the treatment varied, but we went there with open minds and gave them knowledge and ideas so they would continue on their own, independent. They seized the opportunity given to them. They got the help that was there for them, and despite difficulties, they made it. The same in Ghana. This is what we wanted. We proved that even though there are poverty and difficulties, there are also possibilities. You know, in Kenya, people with disabilities are considered to have evil spirits in their bodies. The fact that we put them in a professional environment and worked with them changed many things. There was also great media coverage, and more projects followed. This experience enriched and deepened our work. And the people were asking for more. It was a very important experience and exchange. It is different for one to imagine all this and to actually be there. You feel and you see the differences in culture; you listen and you realize the truth. This experience inspired me a lot in my later work; it gave me the impetus to continue vigorously. I must also say that as a stranger, I certainly have limited knowledge of the local situation, but even in this limited form, the experience still works at the level of bringing images into my work.

NH: How do you choreograph?

In a "mixed" way: we improvise, but I also give set material. I always have subject matter. For example, when we were in Ghana, it was the ritual that there are very strong roots. When we do a project abroad, from the outset, in the country we visit, we audition in order to make a mixed group. We have dancers with and without disabilities work together, and we finally keep five people. The project lasts for two months, and we work six days a week, eight hours each day. At first, we try things and

get to know each other. For two weeks, we just improvise—always on the topic I have chosen and without intervention. Every day, there are questions, stories, analysing, exchanging. Then I start to focus on something, and we improvise again. But in the end, everything is choreographed and clear-cut. We find the quality of each one, and because the group is mixed, I use and do not hide the qualities of the bodies. In Brazil, we had a dancer with extremely intense muscle tone due to his condition—an interesting quality to see. So we did a trio with him and two more dancers. It was very difficult to transfer this tone to a normal body. Also, there is no separation in a place where dancers with and without disabilities all dance together. We all do the same. I use difference, though, to achieve a strong quality, a strong result. To change the way they look. Nobody had, in the example I mentioned above, such a quality of muscle tone; therefore, I needed equally important material from everyone. Differences make me curious. It is what I don't know and want to find more about . . .

NH: What are your plans? What will be your next project?

GK: I don't know right now. I never know what the next project will be, what it's subject matter will be, what it will be like . . . What interests me is to have questions, to get into a dialogue with other countries, to create and to exchange experiences from different cultures. This is important to me.

NH: Would you like to share with me your dreams for the future?

We work in the field of mixed "skills". It is a field that has become better known. The people feel more familiar with it, but they still need training. We do seminars, but we don't have a school for performers with disabilities. I want to be able to get more in the zone of the "normal" dance groups. This is something very important to me, something I consider for the future. I would like to consult with other choreographers and discuss the possibilities, trying things together.

NH: And what about you?

GK: I would like a school, in Germany. Also money for projects and to tour and participate in many festivals. Although I must say that we already have many invitations and work very hard to manage them.

NH: What do you think about the dance scene today?

Sometimes I think that dance is expanding, that it covers larger fields and directions, which I like, and sometimes I wonder, especially inn platforms I go, where did movement go . . . ? Let's allow movement into dance pieces again. I really think that everything has become "performance". Therefore, for now, and in this respect, I don't see it going anywhere, but it is more open, which is good. An example of this is our group—also the work with older dancers and all that. It is more open to different possibilities.

NH: The best and worst of your career so far?

I could not say . . . You definitely work more than what you're paid for, but the moments that magic comes in and touches you, you understand why you do all this, and you say *wow* . . . ! It's a miracle. You make a project, and it progresses, which is also great. This process makes me understand why I am here, in this field, and what the meaning of my work and of art in general is, so I get energy and strength to keep going.

2011 (unpublished)

Mark Baldwin

Mark Baldwin, dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of the Rambert Dance Company (since 2002), was born on the Fiji islands and grew up in New Zealand. After dancing for ten years with the company, which is now run by him, he worked as resident choreographer at Sadler's Wells, where he also founded his own group, the Mark Baldwin Dance Company, which went from 1993 to 2001. He has choreographed over forty works for the Royal Ballet, the Royal New Zealand Ballet, the Berlin State Opera House, the Phoenix Dance Theatre, Scottish Ballet, London City Ballet, and naturally, the Rambert Dance Company. He was awarded several prizes, and among his most renowned works are *Constant Speed (2005), Eternal Light* (2008*),* and *the Comedy of Change* (2009).

NH: Have your origins influenced your work, and if yes, in what way?

MB: I was born in Fiji, and tribal dancing is amongst my earliest memories. Something about the men and women standing in lines imitating tasks and animals with rhythmic sways and gestures has always fascinated me. When I was four, my mother starting taking me to see the ballet, where, in my mind, I believe these two forms of dance merged. My Irish grandparents encouraged me to be interested in music, and as a child, I wanted to learn the violin. Instead, my parents bought me a piano.

NH: How would you describe/define your style?

MB: As a dancer, I was fortunate to dance for a great variety of chorographers. Whilst at university, a group of us started our own dance company in which, through necessity, we created our own work. I like my own dance language to be full of

movement, phrases of densely packed material. For me, that is when it really works. This could be a reaction against the cool pared-down work of minimalism. However, I do like minimalist music, and an early work was set to Philip Glass.

NH: How would you like audiences to perceive your work?

MB: I like to think that my work is for your pleasure and enjoyment, but I also would like my work to come across as sly and compelling, with an emotional charge which is not so obvious to begin with. I feel I have the capability to dive into the musical scores and investigate their very structure.

NH: How did you develop your particular style?

MB: My style really developed (and is still developing) when I discovered my own way of improvising. I had spent many years thinking of steps and movement, but after a workshop with Dana Wrights, the rhythmic impulses, shifts in dynamic tensions, and the flows of phrases triggered by movement really unlocked the choreographer in me. Watching old videos of myself improvising around themes just for the hell of it meant I got to understand myself as a movement maker. I spent ten years, even with no commissions, working in the studio with my camera. This remains the basis of all my work, which comes directly from me, at least in the first stage.

NH: You start to choreograph/create starting from an idea, an image, music?

MB: There is no particular way of approaching, as each project is different. Working with contemporary composers means you must give and take. Sometimes it feels as if you are following their instructions. Other times, it feels as if you can insist on changes and musical differences, depending on where you are in the journey of their work or your own. I have likened the process to staring into a black hole, not knowing where it begins or ends. The thing is to put all the right parts in action and see where it takes you. If I get stuck, it's is back to the

drawing board, back to the studio, back to improvising, back to trusting the dance.

NH: The biggest influences in your life as an artist and regarding your style?

MB: I feel no shame at allowing myself to be influenced by wherever my artistic muse takes me. I loved performing in works by Merce Cunningham, so inventive through his entire life; spending time with Trisha Brown's rehearsal director learning *Opal Loop*; Balanchine, most especially *Four Temperaments* and *Violin Concerto*; Frederick Ashton's *The Dream*; Richard Alston's and Mark Morris's musical interpretations; filmmaker Elliot Caplan; composer Hans Werner Henze, amongst others; Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*; Shakespeare . . . anything that gives me an excuse to invent, reinvent, and use my creativity and imagination in a cross-pollinated way. However, the result should be somehow simple.

NH: Does being the artistic director of a company pose an obstacle to your artistic work?

MB: There is an artistic obstacle in that I am, as artistic director, here to serve the company, but in that serving, I find myself very stretched to search for things that the company needs and stretch myself, put myself on the line so that I am judged against the repertoire. It's challenging, at times gruelling, sometimes satisfying.

NH: What is your biggest dream?

MB: Part of it is about to come true as Rambert moves into a new building on London's South Bank, a purpose-built centre for the company in which process as well as output both find a new centrality in our activities, the development of new choreographers, and audiences for the future. To remain creative, forward-thinking, and forever interested in education is also my dream.

N.H: What do you think is your position in the international dance scene?

MB: I think it would be wrong for me to assume any position at all. I am here to serve the company's talent, and that is my major focus. However, as an artist, I want to keep growing, developing, and learning. This requires commitment from my whole being and from every moment of my existence. From the time I wake up to the moment I fall asleep, the day unfolds in clouds of creative thinking. I have no idea where this journey will take me and what opportunities may present themselves for me to fully realize this research, but the journey is the important bit.

NH: Do you have stage fright before a new premiere?

MB: Yes, I do.

NH: Does criticism affect you? If so, how?

MB: We operate in possibly the most critical city in the world. I have been advised on many occasions not to read reviews, not least from the dance critic of the *New York Times*, who raised his voice, saying, "It's about time you stop reading reviews, Mark." However, people can't help themselves, so I will know which way they fall, mostly from friends, but once a man shouted out a negative phrase he'd read in the paper, "This season's lemon!" as he passed me in the street. I have to be very careful to listen to my own voice first.

NH: What is your motto in life?

MB: Accept the actions as you may have no control over the outcome.

NH: If not a choreographer, what would you like to have become?

MB: My degree is a bachelor of fine arts in painting, rather unusual for a person who thinks through movement. However, the generous scholarship I was awarded to study fine art paid for all the dance classes I so desperately needed as a student.

NH: To you, what is talent?

MB: Talent is a natural gift for certain things. However, it is something that many people have, and it is nothing unless

it is developed. I think it takes about ten years to become a choreographer.

NH: Your biggest fear?

MB: Too many to catalogue, but I was involved in a project where the commissioning company were really unhelpful. I spent most of the time in the dressing room waiting to rehearse rather than developing the work, such a waste of everybody's time, money, and energy. It was so destructive, and I felt embarrassed that all these resources were squandered so selfishly. Recently, I have been watching talks by Sir Ken Robinson about learning from failure, which have been some comfort.

NH: Which work of yours do you love more—and why?

MB: I try to love them all, as I think that is an important thing for a choreographer to do. Often a work that did not come together as well as I had hoped lingers with me while I try to fathom what I could have done differently and what simple device could have pushed the work into becoming a real work of art. Recently, I made a quartet for four women to Julian Anderson's music *Prayer* for solo viola. It was performed twice to celebrate a seventieth birthday. The first time was without the viola player onstage, which was magic. The second time was with the viola player onstage, changing the work completely and making it not work so well. Such is art. Powerful or baffling.

NH: Your future plans?

MB: To work with composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad and visual artist Katie Paterson, to move to our new building in the summer of 2013, to celebrate one hundred years of *The Rite of Spring* with my own version for the students of the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance.

NH: Which is the biggest challenge for you every time you start a new piece?

MB: Wondering what to do, looking at the blank page, doubting whether my improvisations will take me where I might need

to be and whether an audience watching the work will be fascinated and intrigued.

NH: Have you seen something that made you say, "Oh, I wish I had done that!"? If so, what was it?

MB: Admiration has no bounds with me. The monumental achievements of great operas, which try to emulate nature, are quite a good way of putting it for me. If I could achieve something that appeared as if it popped out of nature, I might be happy.

2012 (unpublished)

PHOTOS