



## Do you mean Folklores?

The term "folklore", coined in 1846 by William John Thoms, was originally written with two words which were separated by a dash: folk-lore. It refers to popular traditions, those of sharing and community festivity in groups.

Folklore has often undergone forms of "revivalism", whether to reactivate dances and musical styles under the threat of disappearance, out of a need to come together to dance collectively (for instance, the famous "fest-noz", in a France where popular traditions are no longer practiced by the masses); or, so as to re-affirm the power of the State and the cohesion of a people. In Israel, many young people took part in traditional dance workshops, often makeshift, and countries in Eastern Europe, at the time of the Soviet Union, actively organised meetings of folklore groups.

Dina Roginski distinguished the notion of folklore from "folklorism", a term which appeared during the 20th century, so as to, often in a pejorative manner, refer to all cultural traditions when they appear in their most picturesque and "exotic" aspect. Folklorism may correspond to an empty shell, having lost the vitality, authenticity and sincerity of real folklore, which itself is a living and breathing tradition, danced in its original community. However, in our post-modern and globalised period, many choreographers are interested in these popular traditions to seek inspiration, concealing the living aspect of these often-rigid forms.

What are their motivations and mechanisms? This may first of all correspond to a desire to return to one's roots, to what these learnt folk-dances have left as a trace in the background of the choreographer (as is the case for Eszter Salamon), but also to the desire to affirm an alternative approach and to help discover the richness of a heritage: the Ivorian choreographer Georges Momboye noted that "there is a form of racism, neo-colonialism, which neglects the fact that African culture is an endless source of inspiration". He insists on the fact that African choreographers stop copying from Westerners, and find, on the basis of their gestural traditions, their own writing, at the risk of "eradicating differences". The creation of the École des Sables (School of sands) by Senegalese and French choreographer Germaine Acogny falls into this desire to turn forms of African traditional dance into a contemporary source of inspiration.

This may additionally be the emotion raised by masculine dances, which are unusual in our country, such as the coming together of Christian Rizzo with a Turkish folk dance. This may also be the confrontation of a strong dancing tradition, often far from the choreographer, leading to a form of decentralisation, such as Régine Chopinot who for many years has worked in various locations in the world, notably in New Caledonia with the Wetr group, which recreates Kanak traditions which were prohibited during French



colonisation. The confrontation of folklore is intimately linked to the political history of people and relations of strength: the *Badke* show falls into a KVS project (Brussels) with Palestine, and folk dance, which is the base of creation, is here the means to reaffirm the resistance of a people.

### ***Very Wetr ! - Régine Chopinot***

After a long background as a choreographer in the French "New Dance" movement of the 1980s, and experience in management of a National Choreography Centre for over twenty years in La Rochelle, Régine Chopinot today works at *Pacifikmeltingpot*, a project which combines singing, dancing and music, which she created between France, Japan, New Zealand and New Caledonia. She notably works with Wetr, founded in 1992, which reinvents the Kanak singing traditions which were prohibited during French colonisation. In a post-colonial context, Chopinot finds that it is particularly important not to impose her own vision of events, nor to rest on an exotic image of other cultures: an exoticism which, according to her, is blind and a judgement of value, which prevents real meeting with other cultures, and fails to grant it the place it deserves. Her work as choreographer with the Wetr group is, to lend her own words, a combination of precision and letting-go, so as to be clear in her offering, whilst allowing the freedom for the performers to create their own alchemy. She therefore takes the risk of creation outside of Western and European standards, fostering the emergence of something new.

### ***Coupé décalé - James Carlès***

The *Coupé-décalé* project, initiated by Cameroon-born French dancer and choreographer James Carlès, includes two sections: in the first, "Je ne suis pas une sous-culture..." (I am not a sub-culture), he dances a solo piece choreographed by the South African Robyn Orlin, used to dealing head on with social and political issues. He choreographs the second part for five dancers: "On va gâter le coin !" (We are going to rip it up!), which shows various aspects of the coupé-décalé dance, which can be considered as a form of contemporary folklore. Created in the 2000s in Ivory Coast and Paris within the Ivorian community, the coupé-décalé includes urban dance and music combining Congolese rumba, hip-hop, music from the Caribbean and popular French chanson, and it is composed by various dance steps full of imagery. Made popular under the impulse of a group of Ivorian DJs, the coupé-décalé is danced typically at parties.

James Carlès, through his roots, was faced with two cultural models from childhood - African and Western. As a modern jazz dancer and choreographer, he notably took an interest in Afro-American dance, marked by the history of slavery and the blend between Black and White dance: he has always worked hard to remember the African cultural origins of jazz dance. Markedly, the *Coupé-décalé* project pays homage to jazz which has for a long time been considered as a "sub-culture" through the white and



racist western vision of the genre. *Coupé-décalé* offers a new vision of black dance, a different vision from that harboured in the West, playing on stereotypes and turning one's nose up to colonialism.

### ***Dervish in progress - Ziya Azazi***

Since 1999, Turkish dancer and choreographer Ziya Azazi has explored the sacred traditional dance of Sufis, which dates back to the 13th century. This dance is, at first sight, nothing to do with folklore, since it is spiritual, albeit a part of the cultural tradition of the country, and many groups take to the stage. At its origin, as an initiation ritual, the Dervishes turned on themselves, in a repetitive and continuous manner, so as to annihilate themselves in a mystical ecstasy, to welcome the divine. Through this dizzy ritual, the Dervishes fell into several states of consciousness, and this dance offers a model for the spiritual journey of the Sufi. Whilst the Turn was chosen by the Dervishes, it is because vital energy, according to doctrine, is a gyration, which can also be observed in the movement of the planets. The Sufi turns on itself in an anti-clockwise motion, moving whilst turning in a circular manner. The dance is considered both as an understanding and pulsation towards love which exceeds mankind. Ziya Azazi has appropriated this dance of the Dervishes, and interprets it in a unique way. After having visited several cities of the world, he is returning to the stage with *Dervish in progress*, where he will experience a host of emotional states in relation with turning, with long coloured skirts as partners, which represent the stages of transformation.

### ***Waxtaan - Germaine Acogny***

Germaine Acogny has developed a specific technique for modern African dance, which is an overview of traditional dances from Western Africa and Western contemporary dance. After having directed the Mudra Afrique school, in 2004 she opened the Ecole des Sables (School of sands) in Dakar, Senegal, which is the International Centre for Traditional and Contemporary African Dance. The *Waxtaan* choreography casts a critical regard over directors. "Waxtaan" in Wolof, the language spoken in Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania, means Word or Discussion: the dancers parody people in power and politicians. However this work also highlights and promotes the cultural heritage and popular folklore from several African countries, reinterpreted in a contemporary manner. Musical creation is based on traditional rhythms which are related to the dances of the selected countries. Musicians and dancers of this piece are all alumni from the Ecole des Sables, trained in traditional African dance and also Western contemporary dance. As noted by another choreographer, Seydou Boro, originally from Burkina-Faso: "the independence of African States has generated a movement of reaffirmation of African cultures: several countries rediscovered and claimed their identity". *Waxtaan* by Germaine Acogny, whilst criticising political chaos, pays homage to the richness of African traditions through a modern creation, in the image of the



school created by the choreographer.

### ***BiT* - Maguy Marin**

Two fundamental factors form the basis for the choreographic work of Maguy Marin, since her first works created, and the famous *May B*, inspired by the world of Samuel Beckett, to the most recent pieces: rhythm, in which Maguy Marin was initiated by Fernand Schirren when she studied in Mudra, and the community, the choral work, through listening to the group, and the desire to cast her individual personality within the group. In *BiT*, an implacable rhythm leads dancers in a farandole where various traditions are evoked. Maguy Marin combines various types of folklore and affirms the unifying power of dance. The dancers, three men and three women, dance on six very steep boards. Holding each other's hands, hammering against the floor, or beating out a common rhythm, the group forms and begins a continuous dance which is reminiscent of ancestral traditions. The floor is steep and the soundtrack creates a deafening violence. It is an urgent question of remembering the primitive need to dance collectively, and *BiT* is perhaps a testimony to an attempt at creating a "new folklore", a possible response by dance to the harsh and violent nature of the world.

### ***Magyar Tancok* - Eszter Salamon**

In the danced conference named *Magyar Tancok*, Eszter Salamon looks back over her background as a dancer: for fifteen years, along with her training in classical dance, she practiced traditional Hungarian dance. A journey in 2004 in her country of origin and meetings with the forms of dance which she used to practice as a child are an opportunity for her to ask questions about the traces left by this past experience. What is left from this learning? What is still alive within her from these dances which are now almost forgotten? Since becoming a contemporary dancer, Eszter Salamon has never stopped, in her choreographic choices, from questioning and redistributing gender differences, and she finds the roots of this concern in her training in traditional Hungarian dance, which she admittedly sees as a means of expression, but also as the product of a patriarchal society, where the difference between genders is hierarchically established. These traditional dances indeed have a very codified structure, within which a principle of improvisation allows each individual to stand out. However, this possibility of improvisation was first and foremost reserved for men, who could show the society their virtuosity, strength and humour, whilst women primarily danced together. Having always been attracted by these virtuous masculine dances, Eszter Salamon was never able to perform them in a traditional framework. In this extract, she interprets a masculine dance from Transylvania, which her nephew passed down to her.

### ***Political Mother* - Hofesh Shechter**



As many Israeli dancers, Hofesh Shechter has sought inspiration from folk dance for his contemporary creations. In *Political Mother*, can the telluric force which is released by the group of dancers be seen as being rooted to earth, or rather as an electric dance seen as a means of exorcising tension and violence? In a rock ambiance, which counterbalances a dictatorial regime evoked on stage, a powerful energy is released to the public, whilst an English sentence illuminates at the back of the stage: "where there is pressure, there is folk dance". Hofesh Schechter himself composed the music for the dance, and the bodies of the dancers are thrust into this energy close to trance, on the border between folly and anger, all united in a common heritage, which prevents them from remaining still.

### ***Badke* - Koen Augustijnen**

For *Badke*, Koen Augustijnen, Rosalba Torres and Hildegard De Vuyst have worked with ten Palestinian dancers from various disciplines. The title of this creation twists the name of the dabke, an Arab folk dance, popular in Palestine and various countries in the Middle East. This dance, which is performed by skilful leg work, in a circle and in a line, during marriages and parties, is the basis of the show: it is this dance which brings everyone together in a popular and joyous ambiance. The show begins in the dark, the dancers in a line, with their backs turned, beating out the rhythm with their feet and we hear their screams, in reference to folklore where these are used to give energy to the dance or to accentuate it. The leader, called the "ras" (leader) leads the others and indicates the change to the rhythm.

After a large out spill of festive energy, the dancers finish on several occasions on the floor, slowly beating their heads on the ground, and then simulating a massacre, in slow motion, to the sound of deafening music. It is a counterpoint to the exuberant vivacity and to the thunderous music in which the show is cast, as even during the power cut which takes place on stage, whistles and percussion on the water bottles allow the dancers to continue and accompany each other. The end of the show, in this period, is full of meaning for the choice of a Palestinian folk dance which promotes the pride of this people, with the dance becoming a show of resilience, an affirmation of existence and joy, above all, despite the humiliation and poor treatment experienced each day.

### ***d'après une histoire vraie* - Christian Rizzo**

For Christian Rizzo, abstract choreographer and visual artist, the choreography is above all about space. He develops a clean language, with much affection for slow motion and control of the stage design. Throughout his creations, he has however renewed with various forms of dance, notably through collaborations with the South African group Via Katlehong, or with the Taiwanese group Dance Forum. His creation *d'après une histoire vraie* (based on a true story), created in Avignon in 2013, seeks its origin in the emotional



shock of the choreographer when he experienced, in Istanbul, a masculine dance, which came from Turkish folklore. This strong experience gave him the desire not to recreate the dance, but to ask questions about the vibrations he experienced. The corporal conditions of falling, abandonment, touch, and contact allowing a partner to stay standing on his feet, as well as the masculine empathy, are the basis of the choreography, and the solo by Kerem Gelebek resonates. Didier Ambact and King Q4, on the drums, create a tension compared to what happens on stage, whilst encouraging a removal of partitions to genders.

### **To go further:**

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## Thesis

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## Credits:

Sarah Nouveau has a contemporary dance career with various choreographers (Haim Adri, Jean Rochereau, Nadège Macleay, Régis Bouchet-Merelli, Michele Etori, Elisabeth Schwartz, Monique Duquesne) and directors (Brigitte Mounier). After a long training in corporal theater (The path of the Theater), she was a clown for the Elixir Company, and actress for the Company Detours. She holds a state diploma for teaching contemporary dance and has experience teaching dance to a variety of audiences. She also studied at the Sorbonne in Sorbonne and in choreographic culture with Laurence Louppe at CEFEDM Aubagne. She teaches the history of dance, regularly hosts conferences, and has published L'Harmattan editions "The Wigmanian Body after 'Adieu et Merci'", "Danser l'ailleurs", and "La culture choregraphique au coeur of dance teaching ". Since 2010, she has created shows within her company, the quadrille of lobsters, and develops dance conferences: the show "C.O.R.P.u. ", About the beginnings of modernity in dance, created with the actors of the company of the Bird-Fly, people with mental handicap, turned in Poland and Russia. Having practiced yoga since 2003, she also trained with Bénédicte Pavelak ("Transmitting an art of the body and the voice"), and her research led her to position her teaching differently, the dance becoming privileged medium of a discovery of itself.

### Excerpts selection

Sarah Nouveau

### Texts and bibliography selection

Sarah Nouveau

### Production

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