



## The New French 80's dance

In France, at the beginning of the 1980s, a generation of young people took possession of the dancing body to sketch out artistic areas that would enable them to create their unique take on the world.

From dancer to author-choreographer, the step was made enthusiastically. The Nouvelle Danse Française (New French Dance) was born. Very quickly, this generation gained widespread acceptance, inspired other countries and performed on the world stage.

In a particular political context, François Mitterrand, the then President of France, made an appeal for the mobilization of artists. He appointed Jack Lang, an academic and well-known figure in theatre, to head the French Ministry for Culture.

The Minister for Culture conducted a radiography-diagnosis throughout the country. Dance benefitted from a “dream team”: Maurice Fleuret, director of Musique and Dance and Igor Eisner, Chairman of the Conseil supérieur de la danse (High Council for Dance). The Lifarian Françoise Adret ventured out on the field to discover budding talent.

The Nouvelle Danse Française enjoyed the first grants, the first experiences of decentralization and the establishment of institutions for creating and performing. These young creators, who frequently pursued their passion collectively, dreamt of working on French-style Danse d’auteur.

This inventory would go on to place the spotlight on a selection of emblematic Nouvelle Danse Française choreographers: Dominique Bagouet, Maguy Marin, Régine Chopinot, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Philippe Decouflé, Bouvier-Obadia. This Thema is dedicated to them.

### 1. Maguy Marin

Right at the heart of humanity, the impact of gesture, the power of image. Maguy Marin is to the Nouvelle Danse Française (New French Dance) of the 80s what Pina Bausch was to German expressionism: a major figure. Her caustic, committed work places mankind at the centre of a creative process that constantly questions the future of humanity.

Her subtly-written, radical dance-theatre, marked by the impact of gesture and the power of image, entertains a humanistic intention.

She is one of the few non-American choreographers to have won the American Dance Festival Award. Her work Umwelt garnered an Award in New York in 2008.



Her impressive career comprises over 40 works. Some have been performed hundreds of times throughout the world. Such is the case for *May B*, a sombre creation inspired by Beckett. In 1985, Maguy Marin reinterpreted *Cinderella* for the Lyon Opera Ballet. This enchanting and fantastic modern-day tale pursues its international career.

At the height of her fame, the choreographer accepted an offer to head a choreography centre in a disadvantaged suburb of Lyon. It is paramount for Maguy Marin, “to do and undo together” and to establish her work throughout the diversity of areas.

Her style, which is akin to that of the Tanztheater, incorporates non-danced elements, little nothings of ordinary people. As quick as a flash, through a single gesture, she grasps the essence of her characters. The bodies function in crisis mode.

Since 2011, Maguy Marin has been rediscovering her roots and her birthplace, Toulouse.

## **2. Philippe Decouflé**

A highly-inventive and popular choreographer. He is, without a doubt, the most inventive and most popular French choreographer of his generation. His pure, fantastic, dreamlike theatre gives a prominent place to image and plunges the spectator into the heart of unusual artistic and technological disciplines.

His highly-publicized work is well-known outside of France and is a tribute to the heritage of the American Alvin Nikolais. He discovered the world of his master at the CNDC, Centre National de Danse Contemporaine (National Centre for Contemporary Dance) in Angers.

Trained in circus arts and fascinated by the magic of the circus, Philippe Decouflé adores sharing with the public. A performer, with a natural gift of incredible effortlessness and flexibility.

Since he won 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the Concours de Bagnolet (Bagnolet Competition) back in 1983, this dream-maker has constantly invited us to explore unusual areas: video, ads, the ceremonies of the Albertville Olympic Games, whilst at the Crazy Horse Saloon he reinterprets the codes of desire.

His highly-popular world sways between comic strips and fiction, poetry and fantasy, burlesque and dance with a never-ending pronounced passion for cultural mix, as can be seen in *Caramba*, his first choreographic fiction.



### **3. Jean-Claude Gallotta**

The itinerary of a dancing madman, patriarch of an imaginary tribe. Jean-Claude Gallotta is one of the pivotal figures in 1980s' French-style Danse d'auteur.

At the head of a tribe of artists who are crazy about movements and human experiences, he proposes adventures that thrive on imaginary folklore, on flesh and sensuality, humour and furtive triviality, like in this extract of Yvan Vaffan.

The public discovers with wonder that modern dance can also create stories that reinvent the world.

Nothing ever suggested that this Fine Arts' student, son of Italian immigrants, would become a leading choreographer. Upon his return to France, after a journey of initiation with Cunningham in the USA, Jean-Claude Gallotta embraced dance to fulfil his need to create.

In Grenoble, at the head of the Emile Dubois Group, he became the first choreographer to direct a cultural establishment in the provinces.

Working in a collective fashion, the dancing clown revealed his dreams of bucolic and choreographic cavalcades for fragile males and determined female dancers.

Like a film director, he wrote the scenario of his poetic model that was right on target. His work achieved popular and international public support very quickly.

### **4. Dominique Bagouet**

Itinerary of an ever-so exceptional calligrapher-choreographer. The dancer and choreographer Dominique Bagouet, who succumbed to AIDS in 1992, has left behind him a delicately sketched out, inventive and singular, modest and secluded French-style Danse d'auteur.

His years of training illustrate his curiosity for a myriad of techniques and styles. He began his career with the ex-soloist of the Marquis de Cuevas Ballets, Rosella Hightower. He then moved on to perform in Balanchine's repertoire for Alfonso Cata, and later worked with Maurice Béjart. His encounter with the American choreographer Carolyn Carlson was decisive. He immediately left France to discover the American post-modern dances.



Upon his return, after having won the first prize in the Concours de Bagnolet (Bagnolet Competition), he moved to Montpellier. Here, he founded his troupe and created the festival.

His work brought together contemporary creators of music, visual arts and video. Often labelled as baroque, his dance thrived on perfectly straight tracks, the self-control and energy of a dilettante due to fear of being taken too seriously. This duo extract from *So Schnell* bears witness.

His works abounding in erudite geometries for solo artists joyfully lend themselves to crazy prancing dashes. Since his passing away, the *Carnets Bagouet* performs his repertoire.

## **5. Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia at the heart of the intimate**

This inseparable duo of the Nouvelle Danse Française (New French Dance) have co-written and performed around fifteen choreographies which have become legendary. And, they have been immensely successful.

Their creation of the intimate, filled with spectacular gestures, points to expressionism and divulges its love for the cinema.

It was by chance, back in the 1970s, that these two dancers met each other in the establishment run by the pioneers of modern French dance: Françoise and Dominique Dupuy.

By creating their own company *l'Esquisse*, these two dancers place performance at the heart of their approach and the subject of flesh at the centre of their intentions.

Several of their choreographies have become legendary works. For example, *Welcome to Paradise* written in 1989 using compositional style inspired by the cinema.

Their writing on the intimate and the fragile, filled with heightened lyricism, was a hit with the public of the times, in need of flesh, sensuality and intense emotion.

Since 1999, they have both chosen the path of independence for their creations.

## **6. Régine Chopinot, the extravagant choreographer.**

Born in Algeria, Régine Chopinot began her initiation in modern Dance in Lyon with Marie Zighera. She was captivated by the modern-day register.



In 1981, she gained popularity as a result of winning an award in the Concours de Bagnolet (Bagnolet Competition).

Wishing to burn dance and bodies at both ends, the choreographer called upon strong and totally-unexpected individuals to join her in her adventure: The circus performer-dancer Philippe Decouflé, the gardener-choreographer Daniel Larrieu, visual artists, videographers, the fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier...

Régine Chopinot offers bodies unprecedented performance sets: A fashion show (*Défilé*), a boxing ring, mid-air, a chessboard. She blends gesture into her grain of extravagance and into the eclecticism of her inspiration to produce something new.

In 1984, her work known as *Les Rats* surprised ballet fanatics nostalgic of the Paris Opera who were used to more conventions.

Her contrarian work has a single common thread... that of avoiding writing mannerisms and customs of Italian-style theatre. And this made her successful.



**To go further :**

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## **Credits :**

### Excerpts selection

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### Text and bibliography selection

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### Production

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Francis de Coninck was born in 1951, teacher, journalist, head of the dance department at the INSA (French National Institute of Applied Sciences), dance critic since 1980, television documentary and book author. Biographer of the Liferian Françoise Adret. Blogger of the Petites Chroniques: [www.francis-de-coninck.com](http://www.francis-de-coninck.com) Francis de Coninck lives in Lyon. Since 1987, he has been a regular traveller to West Africa and is interested in the emergence of experiences that thrive on a mix in the western world.

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