



MULTIPLE-S

INTERVIEW WITH SALIA SANOU

Can you tell us about the creation of the three duos in *Multiple-s*?

Salia Sanou : These three duos come after *Du désir d'horizons* and *Clameur des arènes*, which were group shows. After those two creations, I wanted to take a break, almost to “let go.” I needed to focus on something essential, on a question which could be summed up as: Who are you, in the end, Salia Sanou? Who am I, deep inside, after my departure from Burkina Faso and Africa, after meeting Mathilde Monnier and other choreographers and dancers? Who am I after those journeys that have led me to discover other continents? And slowly came the desire to enter into a dialogue onstage with people I like. To broaden the question: how do we talk to one another, about all sorts of subjects, whether we're talking about ourselves or about current events, or dealing with the past, the present, or the future? When I start a new project, reflections of this kind start unfolding; they become intense, and reveal their depth.

Why did you turn to writer Nancy Huston for the first duo, *De vous à moi (From me to you)*?

In the show *Du désir d'horizons*, I'd used her text *Limbes / Limbo*, which is an homage to Samuel Beckett and to his book *Worstward Ho*. I wanted to continue this collaboration. Nancy Huston agreed. I felt relieved, because it was a choice dear to my heart. She sent me three texts, each between 160 and 200 pages long! I read them and focused on some images, on the atmosphere. I sent her back a selection of five pages, with very loose paragraphs, which didn't fail to surprise her! I reassured her by telling her we would work on it in the studio. To my surprise, she immediately positioned herself as an actress. As a child, she studied dance and played the piano. I realised how much those stories had shaped her. We found our own watershed. That's how *De vous à moi* was born: what happens between two people during such an exchange? How can they find a shared space, what I call the third space, she starting with literature, me with the body? This third space is this face-off, which creates a fourth one: the relationship to the audience. We're constantly gliding towards each other's field. And we find similarities between us: the question of exile, of alterity. *Multiple-s* isn't a piece of choreographic work trying to show Salia Sanou and Africa, my discovery of the West, my life and body torn between two places.

The second duo, *De beaucoup de vous (A lot of you)* with Germaine Acogny, deals with the questions of memory and transmission...

Germaine Acogny is the grande dame of African dance. She's done a lot for it, as the director of several schools, and as someone who's shared her experience throughout the world. She's a *Mama*... Any dancer in Africa will tell you they heard of her long before they even started dancing! African dance is forever alive. It remains rooted in our customs and cultures. Even if I've moved away from it from a geographical point of view, I can't keep it away... With Germaine Acogny, this dance travels through time, with its rhythms and cadences, with the energy of the bodies. On the stage, we explore its memory, in particular through that of the body: what does the body go through? What does it absorb? What does it remember? What does it give back? At the start of the duo, Germaine Acogny calls out to me: “Come to my place, I'll show you this dance, my different facets, from Africa to the West.” There's no educational explanation. We explore the substance of the movement. Then we “go on a journey” to ask ourselves: What gestures have we created? And what do we do now, since the Earth is still spinning?

The third duo, *Et vous serez là (And you'll be there)*, was created with musician Babx. With live music this time.

David Babin, aka Babx, wrote the music for the first two duos. For ours, he comes onstage with a piano... Since I'm from Africa, the audience might expect drums, a balafon, or a kora! The instrument already subverts expectations. For the first time, my ear enters into a dialogue with a piano onstage... Babx's music has the power to transport you, to make you “float.” I asked him to write the music for the duo with Nancy, and in the end I didn't have much to say! It felt just right. Same thing with Germaine. Meeting him made me want to write a third duo.

A writer, a choreographer and teacher, a musician... You've also chosen a unique scenography, with a spinning set, which reminds us of the movement of the Earth...

I wanted the scenography to be shared by all three duos. As if they were part of the same universe. When we move from the first to the second, for instance, images of the first remain in the audience's minds and superimpose themselves on the second. However, I needed to choose one image to bring those three moments together: this Earth which never stops spinning, which we all share. Once a duo is over, the cycle continues with the next one. The spinning set symbolises life, the Earth; like the Earth, it can both lead us somewhere or give way under our feet, be either violent or nurturing. It carries us, supports us, as we do for each other in each of the duos, in an authentic spirit of brotherhood. Other aspects of the scenography by Mathieu Lorry-Dupuy and of the lights by Marie-Christine Soma are essential: the neon lights, the windows which are like barriers that open and close and can symbolise a cage, and a carpet whose white can welcome everything, can make every little thing visible. The whole space becomes a metaphor.

Isn't there in your work as a choreographer a permanent desire to subvert expectations, which comes from your history, from an uprooting?

As an African choreographer, I do claim the term of uprooting. Salia Sanou, "man of African descent:" seeing that, the audience probably expects to see a calabash or a cow's tail on the stage! I like to shift things around, to change the way of being of things. It's an auspicious way to enter into a dialogue with others. If people expect me a certain way, it's up to me to appear, to barge in unexpectedly. To avoid the conventional. Hence this need to reinvent myself, to surprise myself. With those three duos, I move away from my position as a choreographer: this project is only possible if the other artists are there, and same with the technicians. What prompted this choreographic writing is an uprooting. It's an experience that gives you a feeling of the world. Which explains why I shift the relationship towards other things, other questions. This uprooting allowed me to see the world differently, both as a man and as an artist. It allowed me to work on the notion of territory. Who says territory says border. All our relationships on this Earth are proof of that. Our body is also a territory, which will have an impact on our space, on the place we enter. With my own history, my own uprooting, I understand my body was a territory. And I discovered that it had the power to think, analyse, and act...

You're also the director, since 2006, of the Centre for choreographic development La Termitière, in Ouagadougou... What are its actions?

It's a place which welcomes a lot of people from poorer neighbourhoods. There those people, who have often lost everything, can learn through dance. We help them rebuild themselves. It's a place of dialogue. Every year, we organise a festival. Choreographers from all over the world come, it's unbelievably stimulating. People who come to the centre can talk to them, with someone from Cameroon, someone from Belgium or wherever... Beyond those periods of training and the existence of the festival, the centre is also open for residencies. Youths can come to create a show and perform it in other cities or countries. It's a unique institution on the continent, which allows us to accompany more complex projects, like going to refugee camps in northern Burkina Faso. I've been there several times with the NGO African Artists for Development. There are youths there who are in great physical condition but see no hope of getting out. They don't expect anything from anyone, they spend their days in small groups. Any extremist can just walk into one of those camps and give them money to have them blow themselves up somewhere. Art can be a way into the camps. Small actions can lead to big changes for those youths. And as they say, where there's life there's hope...

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet

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