

## Outstanding Female Dancer 2017

### Marthe Krummenacher

**“Feel, don’t think.”**

*Deep down, what do you think motivates your desire to dance?*

In my most distant memory I’m sitting in front of the television watching a girl flying through the air. At home my mother used to dance for pleasure and that’s maybe why there was dancing on the TV that day. I don’t remember what it was, a ballet or an opera. A young woman was being borne up by some men so that she could touch the sky and for me as a little girl of five or six that movement was just incredible. It was so graceful, so light and so intense all at once; I’ve never forgotten it. I think ever since then I’ve carried deep within me the idea that dance would always have the power of that flight.

*Has movement – in the sense of movere, mouvoir, moving your body – always been present in your life?*

In a way, yes. I don’t have any memories of Detroit, where I was born, because I left when I was three months old and went to Nicaragua. My parents were working for the ICRC and moving around a lot, so fetching up in different places and experiencing a mix of cultures quickly became my world. During the first sixteen years of my life I was good at all kinds of sport. I just seemed to be a natural: I liked every discipline I tried out and found them all easy. I went from skiing to skating to dance without having to think much about what I was doing. But I think that image of the young woman flying left its mark somewhere, an imprint that was more important than anything because in the end I chose dance.

*You joined La Haye when you were nineteen and spent three years with NDT2 under Jiří Kylián. What do you remember about that first experience?*

It was the first place after the family home where I felt a sense of belonging. That counts for a lot. There were only fourteen of us in the company so we quickly had to take on responsibility for solo parts. I learnt how much your relationship to another person on stage reveals and enriches your relationship with the world.

*Then you joined William Forsythe’s company. You’ve said that was a tougher and more radical experience.*

More than anything I’d say it was more “trash”. You had to be a complete artist with enormous physical commitment plus a very sustained philosophical and political conception of dance. After four years I was brimming over but I wanted to do something else and put down some roots of my own. I came away immensely enriched by everything I’d gained.

*When you were twenty-six you thought about stopping altogether and took up botany. Why was that?*

I don't know. I think I needed to find myself again. Every morning for months I'd get up early and set off with my binoculars to observe the birds and forests. I liked being in the midst of nature. The longing to dance was still there beneath the surface and it came back in the end, but actually observing the world in minute detail was good for me; and although today dance is my whole life again I'm still attached to the earth and that period of observation, when I learnt the potential of rhythm by watching a bird in flight.

*After that there are lots of collaborations, and you get involved with worlds far removed from your own, as if to keep on jump-starting your career.*

Most often what I'm looking for is not dances as such but what makes them work, what animates them. Dancing for someone else can sometimes be just about putting food on the table, a dancer is dependent on the projects they are drawn to; but what really interests me is very much discovering an artistic movement and a human relationship, putting the idea of quality in human relationships at the top of the ladder. That's something I won't compromise on. I've experienced how tough the dance world can be and I don't want it any more. The quality of the relationship with the other person is my priority, because the quality of a dance is profoundly dependent on the quality of our engagement with others and our relationship to them. Otherwise it's a lie.

*On stage, you're an exceptional dancer in the literal sense of the word: someone who is subject to no rules or system of law. Watching you at work on stage is also about witnessing something more: a physical language of singular sensitivity. You have a way of, not dancing but being in full possession of that moment outside time: the time of dance. It's a rather reductive way to put it, but how would you describe your "style"?*

If we have to call it a "style", I'd say it's a style of simplicity in which the body is in a state of presence, in thought; or to put it another way, the body seems to be in harmony with the thought. Something that's suspended, fragile and solid, the expression of an inner energy as much as an experience. The duos are where I express myself best, when the other person becomes your second self, the point of balance that allows for imbalances. Duos require you to be hyper-present and go beyond yourself, and I like that.

*For a number of years now you've been creating your own projects, and there have been some personal works that have allowed the audience into your world; I'm thinking of the voluptuous "RA de MA ré" (2010) with Raphaële Teicher, and "Pousser les bords du monde" (2012). It's a path that seems to be mapped out at your pace, with no pressure...*

It's true I work without pressure, with no expectation except that I'll discover what my body has to say. I need time to create. For me, a choreographic signature is first and foremost a world: a space that has its own language. You can't create that in a day. And for the moment I'm not putting myself forward as a choreographer but as an artist-performer or artist-auteur. If you want an example of a choreographer, look at Maguy Marin: each piece she writes may be totally different from the others, but she has a language that's immediately recognisable.

Her choreographic signature is linked to rhythm, to the way we experience time. It's highly structured work, with a relationship to mathematics that sublimates its subject. It's her way of resisting the current establishment takeover of the dance world that's putting a damper on experimentation. For the last few years I've also been drawing sustenance from another art form: budo, which I practise with the master Akira Hino. I was totally aware of appearance, but with him the only thing that can be true is what you feel. The rest is just illusion. Akira always says "feel", "feel", "don't think, feel". I've never really danced the same way since we met. You depend so much on others to act as your mirror; you grow up in front of so many mirrors, even more so if you're a dancer. Meeting Akira cured me of that. He put me in contact with a different force that is more solid. And the reason I'm being honoured with the Swiss Dance Award today is that personal structure that has been patiently constructed over a long period.

*You're the companion of performer Yann Marussich, and you have a child together. Would you say you enrich each other artistically?*

Yann is a great reader, someone who devours philosophy and poetry. I pick out what catches my eye from his works and we share the things that are preoccupying us. In a way that enriches us, but we are very independent. We'll shortly be flying off for a few months in Uruguay. Yann's going to be producing his own work and I'll be continuing to practise tango. In 2010, as part of a collaboration with the organist Guy Bovet and the choreographer Noemi Lapzeson, I performed the "Tangos ecclesiasticos". It's a dance I love deeply but I don't have a particular aim while I'm down there, except to discover the life force of that culture and the people who live there, and allow myself to be swept along on the tide of encounters.

Interview by Karelle Ménine