

Dominique Martinoli

“The taste of others”

Dominique Martinoli loves dance. She loves its “power to express without words”, the “strength of the issues it tackles”, and the fact that it sometimes requires audiences to “switch off their brains and have trust, allow themselves to be carried along”. But even more than that, Dominique Martinoli loves people. She loves to think in terms of diversity and community. It was that sense of sharing that, almost twenty years ago, prompted her to bring contemporary dance to what she terms the “two Juras”: the canton of that name and the Jura region within Bern.

Thanks to her and to Emilie Schindelholz, who co-founded the association Danse! in 2001, audiences in Porrentruy, Delémont, Biel, Moutier, Tavannes, Saignelégier and St-Imier have been introduced to the exciting worlds of Gilles Jobin, Marco Berrettini, Nicole Seiler, Tabea Martin and Foofwa d’Imobilité. Yet above and beyond the programming for Evidanse, a cross-Jura and transnational project that also extends to Belfort in France, the Swiss Dance Award recognises her tireless work as a mediator. Dominique Martinoli believes that the art of dance belongs as much to those who watch it as those who create it, and so she’s come up with myriad ways for Jura people to engage with it: encounters between audiences and artists and choreographer-led workshops, of course, but also fanzines – known as Danzines – put together with the mediation platforms of Reso, the “Amuse-Danse” toys in kit form for children to build, and creations with amateurs. It’s a long list; and this artistic activist, whom we meet in Biel where she lives, puts in equally long days delivering it all.

Dominique Martinoli, where does your passion for contemporary dance come from?

I was born in Basel fifty-one years ago and from 1978 onwards I grew up in Delémont, in a family of doctors who were passionate about culture. My parents were mainly aficionados of the visual arts and literature. We used to share books and go to all the museums. My sister, who is three years younger than me, became a biologist, and culture is still what binds us together today. As a child and an adolescent, I swam and played volleyball, but when I was around twenty I grew tired of chasing results and started looking around for another way to move. In the early 1990s, contemporary dance wasn’t being taught in the Jura, so I took a classical dance course in Delémont once a week. I met people who were passionate about dance and I went with them to contemporary dance courses and shows in Basel, Mulhouse and Belfort.

What was the Jura like from a choreographic point of view back then?

With the exception of the cultural centre in Moutier, which organised a fortnight-long dance programme every two years (that’s where I discovered Alias and Philippe Saire’s company), the Jura was pretty much a choreographic desert. At the time I was working in Delémont, at the Culture and Youth Centre that later became the music club SAS. We used to organise a

film club and stock up at the Solothurn Film Festival. We'd also see a few plays and concerts – I remember when the Young Gods appeared. But dance lacked appeal.

So in the early 2000s, when Belfort was planning to set up a trinational dance festival covering France, Germany and Switzerland and was looking for Swiss partners, we answered the call by setting up the association Danse! Since the Jura had previously linked up with other regions that were seeking independence, such as Wallonia, the Aosta region and even Quebec, the canton was very pleased that the project existed and funded our participation in the festival. It was amazing: suddenly we found ourselves thrust in among the greats, alongside La Filature in Mulhouse, for example! I learnt a huge amount. Each structure hosted a production and took its audience by coach to see other productions. Having seen how interested people in Jura were in dance, we set up Evidanse in 2004. It's a touring structure that, to this day, brings together seven partners, operates with a budget of CHF 200,000 (including a subsidy of CHF 60,000 from the two cantons) and is based on the idea of a venue that stages a production, hoping that audiences from other towns will come to see what else is on offer.

Are you responsible for the season's programme at Evidanse?

No, the cultural centres in each town arrange the programme for the season, but I advise them, because I see around sixty productions a year and I attend the Swiss Dance Days, trying to take programme organisers along with me. And during our discussions I make sure the productions that are being hosted complement each other.

My first informal foray into mediation, fifteen years ago, involved training programme organisers. Back then, cultural centres were run by associations made up of enlightened amateurs: heads of the local brass band, teachers, doctors and so on. They meant well, but they didn't know much about what was on offer choreographically. You had to familiarise them. Today the situation has changed a lot: cultural centres have become little theatres that are better equipped and better funded. The majority of the money comes from the canton, followed by the communes.

In Evidanse's programme, what proportion are local creatives and how many are guests from elsewhere?

In general, of the seven productions, one is a local creation. Then we also have national names. And because we work with Steps, the festival organised by Migros Culture Percentage, we are lucky enough to attract international artists as well.

Evidanse also involves a lot of mediation. Are there any examples you're particularly fond of?

I particularly like projects where the audience are encouraged to dance themselves by attending workshops or taking part in creating a show. Like "Aventures en Royalland" by Mike Winter and József Trefeli in 2017, for example, which took 16 people from different backgrounds and encouraged each of them, from the musician to the graphic designer, to draw on their skills to fashion a work of dance. My liking for immersion is probably due to the fact that after studying literature I took a DAS in Tanzkultur, choreographic cultures, at the University of Bern, where I attended all kinds of classes, from flamenco to salsa via classical dance. I realised just how much better you understand movement when you're dancing.

You also offered students the chance to choose the show they were going to see. Was there anything that struck you particularly?

That's right, last year we asked a class from Delémont business school to choose the productions from Evidanse's programme that pupils from the whole institution would see. What struck me was that the companies which didn't have video clips to show were immediately sidelined, because these young people need to see something in order to make up their minds. And when they viewed the clips, they preferred the works where there was a lot of movement. Speed and physical prowess matter to them.

Did that make you realise the limits of the genre? If you include the audience too much in the creation or selection process, don't you run the risk of homogenising everything?

That's the big question when it comes to mediation. It's good for the viewer to assume some ownership of a project that's under development; but ultimately, of course, it must remain the property of the artist. It's the same when you're presenting a piece. You have to say enough for the audience to be able to follow, but not so much that you dictate how the viewer feels about what's being offered. You're always treading that narrow line, and that's what's so exciting about it.

Interview: Marie-Pierre Genecand