

Outstanding Male Dancer 2019

Edouard Hue

“Dancing is about talking with your body”

What does this Outstanding Dancer award mean to you?

I'm delighted and it's a huge surprise. I was at the Avignon Festival handing out flyers in the street for our pieces "Forward" and "Into Outside" when I heard the news. I couldn't believe it! In my mind, honours like that are for forty-year-old dancers who have proved what they can do many times over. I'm only twenty-nine! This award is an acknowledgement of my work in the companies that hired me and my solo "Forward".

How will it change things?

It creates pressure! I felt it in Avignon as soon as I was on stage after the award was announced. I have to live up to the title! Now I know that there are people counting on me and following me.

Have you already noticed an impact?

Yes. I was able to dance at the award ceremony in Fribourg in front of five hundred professionals. Thierry Loup, the director of Équilibre-Nuithonie, was there. He liked what I was doing and suggested I come and work with him. The programme organisers that I contact respond much more quickly to an invitation. For "Molten", which we've just put on at the Parfumerie in Geneva with my Beaver Dam Company, we got replies from around ninety professionals. That kind of response is down to the award.

What makes an outstanding dancer?

Last summer in Avignon, I saw "Outwitting the Devil" by the Anglo-Indian choreographer Akram Khan. The first dancer on stage blew me away. His body spoke for itself. It looked as if he was glowing. I'd never seen such power. The guy had exceptional technique and sincerity. It was just totally convincing.

So dancing is first and foremost an athletic effort?

That's certainly true for me. Dancing is about talking with your body. It's all about physicality: what I call sincerity must start from the tips of your toes and spread all the way up to the top of your head. It has to flow out from within you.

How would you define your job as head of Beaver Dam Company?

I'm a director! Although from a legal standpoint our company is an association, I run a cultural structure. I'm in charge of administering the troupe, the budget, and organising our

tours. That side of my work takes up more of my time than the studio! But it's essential. If we want to develop, we need to have every advantage on our side. For example, we've just completely overhauled the design of our website. Communication is essential.

When did dance come into your life?

I was sixteen and a half and living in Annecy. I was playing a lot of basketball and I was attracted by hip-hop. Near our house there was a conservatory offering street dance lessons. I signed up on the spot. After my school-leaving exam I was headed for a commercial career. I was at university, but I was taking dance lessons in Geneva with Foofwa d'Imobilité. I travelled there and back every day.

How did you turn professional?

As part of my studies I had to do an internship in a company. I asked Foofwa d'Imobilité if he'd be prepared to take me on so I could learn about administering a cultural structure. He said yes and I found myself at the Avignon Festival where he was presenting a piece. My big stroke of luck after that was being accepted into the Ballet Junior in Geneva. For two years, I juggled dance school with my work as an assistant administrator. One day, one of Foofwa's dancers injured himself and he suggested I replace him. I found myself dancing his "Fenix" at La Fenice in Venice!

Who influenced you after that?

The Israeli choreographer Hofesh Shechter. After a year dancing for Foofwa, I joined his company in London. It's thanks to Hofesh that I started choreographing. He was so impressive and generous that he made you want to create for yourself.

What did he teach you?

The absolute necessity of the gesture. He has an exceptional bodily intelligence. I really believe he changed the face of dance. Many choreographers do sub-Hofesh. Some actually say that about my work. They're not necessarily right, but it's true that I've been enriched by his aesthetic.

The French choreographer Olivier Dubois is also one of your artistic godparents. What did you learn from him?

To have faith in your project. He often told me that you have to stick to your goal whatever anyone else thinks. Not listen to critical voices, basically. And believe in your desire.

Which choreographer would you like to dance for?

The French acrobat, circus artist and director Yoann Bourgeois. I'm receptive to his imagination and his performers, who are capable of amazing aesthetic feats. I'd love to dance for Akram Khan, of course. And for Philippe Saire, someone whose work touches me and who I trust.

You've just created "Molten", a piece for five dancers. What instructions did you give them during rehearsals?

I gave them a lot of images, especially the geyser. I told them it starts from the haunches. I very often refer to the visual world of mangas – graphic novels where the relationships between beings are unexpected and often extreme. The material inspires qualities of the body and character.

Do you see a lot of shows?

No, very few. I stopped going to the theatre in September 2018. Back then I was seeing between seventy and ninety shows a year. I needed to recentre myself on my practice, my imagination and my dreams. Last season I saw only three performances, one by Hofesh Shechter, another by the Batsheva Dance Company and the third by William Forsythe.

You don't dance in "Molten". Why is that?

With "Molten", my job is really to be the choreographer. If I'd been dancing I wouldn't have been able to stage the production as I see it. I aspire to create pieces that I'd dream of seeing as an audience member. That means putting yourself in their shoes: being in the room to feel the effect of the dance.

Do you feel that you belong to a generation of artists?

I claim a lineage with the French choreographers of the 1980s: the duet of Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Angelin Preljocaj: all artists who cultivate a powerful physicality. I feel as though I'm continuing in that vein. At the Conservatoire in Annecy, I was lucky enough to take lessons with Robert Seyfried, one of Jean-Claude Gallotta's leading performers. He showed us videos of the great works from those years.

What is your relationship with Switzerland?

It's my second country, the one where I learnt to dance and my company took shape. In French-speaking Switzerland, relationships are more simple and direct than in Paris, where there's a kind of artificiality, at least in the artistic scene. I won't forget all I owe to the Ballet Junior and its directors Patrice Delay and Sean Wood. They gave me a base, artistic roots.

Where do you see your career five years from now?

I've got some projects for pieces with my company, including one for a young audience about magic, taking me up to 2022. We're in the process of setting up a distribution network in Switzerland and France. We're going to focus even more on mediation at schools in Geneva. In five years' time, I hope we'll have gained international reach.

Interview: Alexandre Demidoff