

Current Dance Works, 2017–2019

Linga company & Keda: “Flow”

“Interweaves bodies, disciplines and cultures”

Based in Pully, Linga – the Hindu symbol of fertility – is the resident company at the Théâtre de l’Octogone. It’s a two-headed outfit comprising a duo of choreographers who are partners in life as well as on stage: Marco Cantalupo, Italian, born in Genoa; and Katarzyna Gdaniec, Polish, born in Gdansk. Two opposites that both attract. He’s the Cartesian, always doubting and thinking things through. She’s instinctive, digging deeper when she feels it is right. The two artists boldly mix their contrasts, giving birth to some thirty long works, or twice that number if you count their small formats and their many off-stage performances. In 2002, their most beautiful creation is Asia, their daughter, who joins her half-sister Raya, born in 1992.

A star dancer with Maurice Béjart, Katarzyna Gdaniec first experiences the excessive discipline of gymnastics in the former Soviet bloc countries, being “trained like a racehorse”, as she puts it, before learning to dance “often with bloody feet”. After winning the Prix de Lausanne in 1983 she joins the Ballet du XXe siècle, which later morphs into Béjart Ballet Lausanne (BBL). “I’ve always enjoyed battling with my body,” she says. “I like pure dance, finding the movement that will be the next splash of colour in a choreographic tableau.”

While his companion is busy dealing with a regime of tough, physical exercise, Marco Cantalupo has an eventful youth. At the age of 16, he informs his father that he wants to be a dancer. “For me, dancing was initially an act of rebellion!”, he recalls. He enrolls in a ballet class at the Milan School of Opera, where his sister Paola is remembered as a brilliant pupil. He fails to make the same impact: “One day, the director told me I would never be a dancer!” (Later, when he meets her again, she will claim that he had been her favourite pupil.) Marco Cantalupo becomes a soloist at BBL but doesn’t stay one for long, preferring to deprive the teacher of his most treasured female dancer: “Together, starting from our opposing forces, we created equilibriums that were always on the verge of breaking up and exploding,” he recollects. It’s an awareness of the fragility of existence that comes across in all the duo’s works, in which weightlessness battles constantly against the force of gravity.

What does receiving this Swiss Dance Award mean to you?

Marco: We’re very touched because this is an award from a nation. It’s recognition from our peers that extends beyond a region. It means that a lot of players in the scene are looking towards us with heightened interest. It’s also a label that underlines the quality of dance in Switzerland and awakens interest abroad.

Kathy: I have a spring in my step as I walk down the street. It’s boosted my confidence. This award marks almost thirty years of dancing, something that lasts. An enormous baggage that means ever increasing pleasure with each new creation. During all those years our style has constantly evolved, but this award acknowledges that we have our own distinctive signature.

On that point: how would you define your style?

K: I try to do something different every time. Today, with experience, I feel freer. I work with a vision and I try to embody it. It's never really what I imagined, but what emerges is stronger.

M: I think our style has been nurtured by all our experiences. It's a bit like a society building itself: you start off with a revolution and then the society's structures change. They don't stay permanently in revolution. Choreographically there are also movements and gestures that take things forward. Today what we try to achieve is simplicity, being in the essence of the gesture, while remaining physical and dynamic. We want to touch our audience through the kinesthetic empathy that comes from movement and not just thought.

What's the secret of your durability?

M: We've always wanted to move forward in our exploration of gesture and our intellectual quest. We've been doing that since the very beginning. A number of themes have run through our work, such as overconsumption and domestic violence. Last year we created "Walls", about immigration. We are both immigrants ourselves, and we've broken through different walls. This year we've been working on exchanges and interweavings of language between music and dance in "Sottovoce". We feel a need for fluidity that comes through in our movements. Being free is part of the reason we started dancing. Dancers don't have frontiers or linguistic barriers. We like to explore limits, be they artistic or scientific.

K: The basis of our longevity is the fact that we love our work. At bottom, we are artisans: we continue to carve and knead the material to extract a dance work from it. It's no longer the kind of dance that people did back in the day, the kind that was called aesthetic dance, but it is still dance. Personally, I love folklore and it inspires me because it's also a reflection of society. You can pick out something that's already there and transform it. The world of dance is so broad. There's enough material for another 30 years at least!

How do you stay contemporary?

It's not a question of how to stay contemporary, because every human being and every artist develops, matures, grows and isn't the same person from one day to the next. You only become out of date if you stay tied to a choreography that's run its course. We aren't hermits, we exchange ideas with young dancers, we evolve with the times and so our work does the same. When you're thinking about a project, you're always imposing new constraints on yourself: that's what makes it stimulating. Our most recent creation, "Sottovoce", is complex, with singers who have to move and dancers who have to sing. We had to find ways of making the harmony work, and that's contemporary too.

K: I think what matters most is the intrinsic quality of the work. I may not like a particular genre but if I get something from the performance I can overlook that. I just want to be inspired, to cry, to be moved or to laugh. To still be thinking about it a year later and telling myself it was a magic moment.

Has music always been very present in Linga's creations?

M: We travel to the four corners of the Earth for collaborations or shows. We've been to the Middle East, Palestine and Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, South America, India and South Korea. Each time we listen to local music. That gives us the openness to others that's always inspired me. Music is an immense art that touches everyone.

K: In our last piece I discovered the qualities of the singers, especially a sense of discipline that is similar to what dancers have. And of course, singing involves the body. Singers have a particular kind of physicality that ensures the sound comes out correctly. I've learnt a lot from working with musicians. Sometimes it works perfectly, as with "Flow" and the duo Keda, where we feel we are all part of the same family.

Have you achieved what you wanted to by becoming a dancer and choreographer?

M: As regards work, yes, in the sense that we've always wanted to be independent and we are. We've always wanted to have our own signature, and we have it. We wanted a cosmopolitan company with widely differing worlds and influences, we wanted to take risks and we do that every time we create something.

K: Artistically, never – otherwise you die! Our big dream is to work on an opera. A Baroque opera. That would really be a great challenge.

Interview: Corinne Jaquiéry