

DANSE ÉLARGIE, FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

The first edition was held in 2010. And it could have all ended there. Initially, there was nary a guarantee that the experiment named Danse élargie would continue. **“But artists said, We want to have the next one!”** remember Boris Charmatz and Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota, **“Why stop, when we have seen that it produces incredible things!** The word **“incredible”** reappears often while recalling events that marked the journey of Danse élargie at Théâtre de la Ville. Like the artists onstage, the audience too experienced unforgettable moments. There was the year when hundreds of walk-ons queued up in front of the theatre, on Place du Châtelet, before invading the stage, entering and exiting in precisely ten minutes, obeying the rules of the competition to the letter. We could attend pretty sporty performances (badminton!) or oddly animal-heavy ones, with dogs, a sheep, or even an invasion of alligators in disguise.

From the earliest editions,
between these unlikely frescoes,
emerged talented young artists who,
today, are widely recognised, ...

... and several of whom run national institutions : Noé Soulier, (LA)HORDE as well as Johanna Faye, Saïdo Lehlouh and the late lamented Ousmane Sy, co-founders of FAIR-E. The two groups, currently heading the CCN Ballet national de Marseille and the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne respectively, have become key supporters of Danse élargie!

These powerful flashes from past editions could not hide the fact the road map of the competition has never resembled a long, placid river. In 2020, in the grip of the pandemic, the organisers had to reinvent the project differently. Danse élargie had to find new partners such as the Ministry of Culture, and from this year onwards the sponsorship of the Caisse des Dépôts and the Institut français, while maintaining the vital support of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès and help from the SACD. Today, the challenge is to weave support networks for the artists, both in France and abroad, with the help of the Institut français branches which share their address books. From the initial “happening” has emerged ...

... an increasingly stable framework, truly a beacon on the choreographic landscape.

With the result that Danse élargie, ripened into a designated product – of origin proudly unprotected! – has been adopted by finalist companies as a highly treasured seal of approval both in France and abroad (this year, 454 applications arrived from 63 countries). Moreover, to strengthen the support given to finalist teams, there are residencies made available, after the competition, in collaboration with associate organisations in Île-de-France as well as other regions, among whom number the CCNs of Rennes and Marseille. The 2022 edition, the 7th one of the competition, which is still very young, will also be the first to be livestreamed from the auditorium of Théâtre de la Ville-Espace Cardin.

THOMAS HAHN

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

BORIS CHARMATZ / [TERRAIN],

CLAIRE VERLET (THÉÂTRE DE LA VILLE),

AND QUENTIN GUISGAND (FONDATION D'ENTREPRISE HERMÈS)

LOOK BACK ON THE EARLY DAYS OF DANSE ÉLARGIE.

How was Danse élargie born ?

BORIS CHARMATZ: This competition was born out of a specific context. Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota had just arrived as director of Théâtre de la Ville and was open to change. As for me, I was starting off at the Musée de la danse and I wished to rework historic formats : I was mulling over the competition format which had become quite underrated, although in its day, the Concours de Bagnolet had spurred a real artistic ferment.

QUENTIN GUISGAND: After Boris Charmatz came to see Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota with the idea of a competition, they immediately suggested it to the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès. The project was really finetuned between the three.

What does this competition mean to you ?

CLAIRE VERLET: It is a space of freedom, a breadboard where things you'd believe impossible are made. What is important, beyond the prizes, is being there in this hothouse of energy, and most of all, the fact we are committed to following them whether or not they win a prize. Often, they are young artists, working in unstable conditions. A miracle happens when our ultra-professional teams rally around them, in the same way they do around the biggest names of our season. During the first edition, when the technicians saw all of these people land up for rehearsals, I have to say, it created a bit of a ruckus. But what wonders we found in that ruckus ! Each edition produced its surprises, because projects really come into their own only when on stage.

Q. G.: The Fondation d'entreprise Hermès immediately committed to supporting the competition, to funding the three prizes and also to supporting the programmed work of Danse élargie artists at the opening of the following season. Today, the Foundation has increased its investment because it coordinates three residencies offered to finalist teams, in collaboration with partners in the Île-de-France region, among them the Fondation Royaumont, la Chaufferie and la Briqueterie – CNDC of Val-de-Marne. Through three successive MDs – Catherine Tsekenis, Annick de Chaunac and now Laurent Pejoux – the Foundation has remained steadfast to this competition which brings new talents to the fore. So it really makes sense to us, and it falls within the ambit of a support scheme for performing arts called Artistes dans la Cité. We have really established a flow of artists between the two, also with our curatorial programme New Settings.

He who says competition, says jury. Here, it is a jury from various fields.

A unique concept !

B. C.: I am not against (the presence of) curators in a jury, but it was a strong suit (of Danse élargie) to have solely artists facing other artists. Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota and I were part of the jury during the first edition and we understood swiftly that we should not be there anymore.

C. V.: A jury of artists changes everything ! The concerns are solely artistic, unskewed. The list of all the juries who have participated – and they all did it pro-bono – is impressive ! They all told us **“It was splendid, we never get to have discussions like this among artists.”** And one of the reasons, of course, is that they come from such different horizons.

INTERVIEWED BY TH. H.

A NEW GENERATION : THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

FAIR-E AND (LA)HORDE

By participating in the 2016 and 2018 editions of Danse élargie, Johanne Faye & Saïdo Lehlouh (jointly directors of the FAIR-E Group since 2019) and (LA)HORDE succeeded in becoming known well beyond the circles of staunch early followers. We could even posit that they were partly established by this experience. Today, themselves partners in the organisation of the competition, they participate in developing the new format of what is truly a platform of accompaniment for young artists. And thus...

... they are returning the support they received – informal back in the day – to new generations of artists.

Johanna Faye and Saïdo Lehlouh of the group FAIR-E, who took over the reins of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne from Boris Charmatz, state “We told each other we needed to continue our history with Danse élargie. It is the only choreographic competition in Europe that prioritises the desire and the necessity to delve into and comment on the question of form, that invites international artists who approach movement in so many different ways.”

(LA)HORDE (now heading the Ballet national de Marseille) echoes the same sentiment :
“We owe a lot to this competition, and we didn’t want it to stop”.

And that is hardly a coincidence because FAIR-E and (LA)HORDE exemplify...

... new ways of imagining the running
of national dance institutions.

In Rennes, six choreographers (including the late lamented Ousmane Sy) ran the organisation together, sharing its resources. In Marseille, Marine Brutti, Jonathan Debrouwer and Arthur Harel decompartmentalized mindsets and practices. From these successes, the two groups gain confidence in the possibility of a concrete utopia.

They bring their lifeblood
to the organisation of the competition...

... and to the support framework for the artists that Théâtre de la Ville has built, with the help of the Fondation d’entreprise Hermès, the SACD and – henceforth – the sponsorship of the Caisse des Dépôts. By supporting all of the selected artists – over and above the winners alone – the founding spirit of Danse élargie is strengthened, thanks to an entente cordiale between co-organisers, now allied with other teams of producers, promoters and sponsors. As for the artists, finalists from all continents can now converse with members of the jury to forge bonds that sometimes endure. The new partners of the competition know what it is to be finalists themselves, and wish with all their hearts that the participants of today and tomorrow might enjoy the same experience.

TH. H.