Revue TENTEN

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MOVE/STILL

JAPON dance project

**JAPON dance project is a floating territory of Japanese choreography in constant movement – with Monaco and Tokyo its two home ports – which five top-flight dancer/ choreographers steer wherever the wind blows. JAPON dance project will be performing its next dance creation – entitled “Move/Still” – on 27 and 28 August 2016 at the New National Theatre of Japan (Tokyo). We invite you to immerse yourself in this wonderful journey with Mimoza Koïke…**

**Could you tell me something about your career as a dancer/choreographer?**

I started dancing when I was six. But I had to go abroad in the end because I was too tall to make a career as a professional dancer in Japan. So, when I was fifteen, I went to study at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in Lyons, later graduating to the Jeune Ballet at the same institute. In 2001, I began dancing with the Ballet du Grand Théâtre in Geneva, and since 2003 I’ve been working as a choreographic artist with the Ballets de Monte-Carlo under the direction of Jean-Christophe Maillot. I was promoted to principal dancer there in 2005. What I still really like about the company after all these years is the opportunity to dance completely different roles in different registers, whether we’re working with Jean-Christophe or with one of the guest choreographers. And also the fact that we get to do a world tour each year. Both of these things have helped to shape my development as a choreographer. For a start, the world tours were an opportunity to film myself improvising short choreographies that were inspired by the atmosphere of the different places we visited. I also learnt a great deal working with Bernice Coppieters. He taught me to really delve into the depths and explore who I really am. And the joy of artistic creation is something I got from Jean-Christophe Maillot. It’s so thrilling being involved in the development of one of his creations and sharing in his explosive creative energy!

But my own creative work really took off when Jean-Christophe invited me to collaborate as a choreographer in the Imprévus des Ballets de Monte-Carlo. This was part of the young choreographer/young set designer project where the Ballets join forces with the École Supérieure d’Arts Plastiques de la Ville de Monaco. I was involved with the project from 2007 to 2012. And just recently his Serene Highness Albert II of Monaco made me a Knight of the Order of Cultural Merit.

**Mimoza is a very unusual name. Where does it come from?**

Before I was born, my parents spent some time travelling round Europe, and then finally settled down in Cassis, just near Marseilles. My father was studying architecture at the Beaux-Arts de Marseille. My mother was a pianist but had decided to become a painter. While they were driving around the region in their 2CV, they fell in love with the mimosas. They called their car MIMOZA to start with, but when I turned up, in Japan, a few years later, it was me who got the name! (Laughter) This little story about my name is one thing, but I also think it’s because of coming into contact with my parents’ different skills that I make sketches, using paint and light, in support of my choreographic work. And it’s certainly the reason why I love working with visual artists and set designers.

**When and how did JAPON dance project come into being?**

In 2012, I took part in a Gala in Tokyo in honour of the victims of Fukushima. It was there that I met – and danced with – Yasuyuki Endo and Masahiro Yanagimoto, and Naoya Aoki, who was also taking part in the event.

Meeting these people was incredible because through dance we were able to do something for our country. Really soon after that we began to feel we’d like to create an opportunity for artistic exchange, bringing together our shared cultural heritage and our individual creative experiences. Yasuyuki contacted me to suggest a continued collaboration with other Japanese choreographer/dancers. And from there we went on to form a working group consisting of Yasuyuki Endo, Hokuto Kodama, Naoya Aoky, Masahiro Yanagimoto and myself.

**Why did JAPON dance project become a Logoscope project (based in Monaco)?**

In 2010, I joined the team at Le Logoscope (Laboratory for multi-media artistic research) as artistic director of its performing arts platform. I have always been really interested in the potential cross-over between different creators and different artistic fields within the structure of this organisation. This collaborative enrichment, which very often takes me to places I would never have found on my own, is fundamental to my way of thinking and my whole approach to the creative process. In 2013, having brought together this group of Japanese dancer/ choreographers, we needed a structure to enable us to develop our project. So, we approached Le Logoscope. They could see the logic straightaway in this link-up, since JAPON dance project also serves as a platform for research, collaboration, creativity and intergenerational transmission. What’s more, JAPON dance project is a sort of floating island where Japanese culture imagines itself both here and elsewhere. We needed at least two “home ports” to give the project some kind of geographic identity, and now we had Tokyo and Monaco. In fact, MOVE/STILL, which we will be performing this summer, is part of the programme celebrating ten years of diplomatic relations between Monaco and Japan.

**How do you manage to work with the other four dancer/choreographers, given how far apart you all live (one in Marseilles, one in Stockholm and two in Tokyo)?**

Our primary tools are video and the internet. They are a way of meeting and setting up projects, working out dramatic elements, discussing set designs and so entering into a dialogue with the other artists involved as well as dealing with logistical issues and publicity. But we still need to meet physically for certain stages of the work. So two or three of us, sometimes all of us, get together in Tokyo, Marseilles, Monaco or Cannes several times a year. This gives us the opportunity to sort out any issues and move things along, choreographically speaking, in real rather than virtual space. This is where video is really important because it allows us to capture these experiences and share them remotely with the others.

**What are your priorities when developing your research and your choreographic work?**

Firstly, we’re working within the parameters of what you might call contemporary choreographic practices. But this is above all a project in perpetual movement and it often leads us to collaborate with other guest Japanese artists.

It’s through a process of knowledge-sharing that each of us as individuals – moving back and forth between “inner” and “outer” – between Japan and the rest of the world – express our desire to perfect our relationship with dance and with our own culture.

**The New National Theatre of Japan, in Tokyo, is due to put on a new creation by JAPON dance project this summer. Can you tell us a bit more about it?**

Before telling you about that, I should just say a bit more about our connection with the New National Theatre of Japan. In 2013, we performed our first dance creation, *Le Paradis des Fourmis*, at L’ESDC Rosella Hightower in Cannes. Mr Tatsuo Mochizuki (the New National Theatre’s Chief producer) came to see us dance. He really liked our work and invited us to create a new choreographic piece every couple of years to be produced and staged by the New National Theatre in Tokyo. That’s how we came to create CLOUD/CROWD in 2014. And this year, on the 27th and 28th of August, we’ll be performing MOVE/STILL, preparatory work for which has also received support from the SO.GE.DA.-Monaco. This new piece interrogates our notions of time and space from within the boundaries of an imaginary park. We were focusing on the fact that – whatever happens to us in life – we are obliged to keep going, to evolve, adapt and move on. And yet at the same time there are things like this park that are as it were suspended in time. But are they really? MOVE/STILL enacts a process of observation that is simultaneously tumultuous and harmonious…

Interview conducted by Agnès Roux