

## YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING YET!

### **Christian Rizzo examines the foundations of his choreographic practice.**

His many years of work in choreographic language and visual compositions have resulted in a unique style that goes beyond contemporary dance. Since 2007, Rizzo has been an artist in residence at L'Opéra de Lille while being invited to travel frequently to Asia as a choreographer and a visual artist. During this time, he mounted several exhibitions, including *le sort probable de l'homme qui avait avalé le fantôme* ("the probable fate of the man who swallowed the ghost") for which he conceived the set design and was co-curator with Bernard Blistène, presented at Nouveau festival, Pompidou Center, Paris, Fall 2009. Rizzo has also been a guest artist-professor at Le Fresnoy, Studio National des arts contemporains in Tourcoing, where he supervised students' work and completed multimedia installations. Moving beyond his familiarity with electronic and rock music, Rizzo also has explored opera, and in June 2012, he will direct a new staging of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* at Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse. From the world of Wagnerian Opera to the workshops with mentally handicapped actors at L'Oiseau Mouche based in Roubaix, Rizzo finds inspiration in a variety of experiences that are reciprocal and help support his choreographic investigations.

### **His thoughts on what is most important :**

#### **LOVE**

The presence of another person engenders a question whose answer could be love, which for me is the essential reaction to all creation. The artist James Lee Byars said, "Beauty is the response, not the question."

#### **DOUBT**

To doubt is to begin without knowing the rules, to throw all the dice, and it allows me to avoid posturing and repetition. When I begin, I may have an idea and it is what it is, but the work doesn't exist yet. During the creation process I concentrate on a transformation revealed through the movement of the body, the music, and the lighting. I am interested in opposition. I work in the space between the action and its opposite.

## **SCENIC VOCABULARY**

The scenic vocabulary gives shape to my observation. I am an artist who is not satisfied with the way things are organized. I need to organize a space and time that is the stage.

## **ENERGY OF VIBRATION**

My concern is to stage the energy of dancers – the electric energy that Patti Smith refers to in Rock Music. In performance, energy is never wasted, but compressed. It gains volume in the interaction between dancers and their environment, the volume of vibration.

## **FRAGILE ASSOCIATION**

Any human undertaking is fragile and this makes our work together precious. The name of my company, “*L’association fragile*” may be understood as a warning - to be careful: “What we show here is fragile.” In my opinion, creative exploration is always fragile.

Today while the fortification of everything is axiomatic, I want to make it fragile. I never choose virtuoso dancers. I prefer a fragile body who can’t achieve everything but brings spirit to what is being done. There is space for the other person in making everything fragile. By itself, even the word is beautiful.

## **SMOKE SCREEN**

I like a mask that blurs identification. When I began to dance, the discrepancy between my physical appearance and the ideal dancer allowed for variety. I explored this, and then left performing to be the choreographer. I withdrew from the stage. This is what suggests the portrait with my face obscured by the smoke of a cigarette. (The poet and early modernist) Paul Morand said, “smoking enables a cloud between the self and the world.” On a theatrical stage, smoke is an artifact of manifestation and disappearance. The staged *Sfumato* (one of the four canonical painting modes of the Renaissance) blurs shades and shapes, obscures borders, and sharpens the role of the spectator in ambiguity, paradox and problem solving.

## **CITY OF LILLE**

The Opéra of Lille represented a starting point for explorations, more than just a formidable place to work. Lille and its region allowed for an expansion of my activity that resulted in differences in the type of project: At Le Fresnoy (Studio national des arts contemporains de Tourcoing), and with L’Oiseau Mouche (a company based in Roubaix for actors with mental handicaps), and at La Malterie (an alternative arts center)

- and at the Opera with the performances and evenings that I created or curated. The end of my residency at the Opera of Lille does not signify that my presence ends in the region of Nord-Pas de Calais.

## **LYRIC ARTS**

My five-year residency at the Opéra of Lille provided opportunities to reach a diverse audience with whom we shared the performances I presented. I developed an infatuation with lyrical arts, and that has built my confidence in facing the new work that I will stage at the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse in June.

## **HOME – THE HOUSE CALLED “HOME”**

*“The house, it is the house called ‘home’ for the family; it is for the men and women and their children; it is to keep them in a place made for them, to restrain their confusion, to distract them from the desire for adventure, their desire to escape, their desire for freedom that has inhabited them since the beginning of time.”*

It is not me who said this. It was Marguerite Duras. I do not have this type of home with a family. I try to build a family with those who accompany my artistic work. One day I would like to offer them a house and to build a project together. The house I imagine does not signify withdrawal into oneself - but the opposite: the opening to the world outside. It is time for me to have the various paths of my artistic exploration converge in single direction toward a point of incandescence.

## **MUSIC**

It is through Rock Music that I came to performance. Indeed I did *not* wake up one morning telling myself, “Hey, I want to be Baryshnikov.” It was more my thing to be David Bowie. My initiation happened during a trip to London in 1978; I was 14 years old and deeply moved by Punk. Later, I found my way watching the group The Residents on stage. They were masked, and they blurred notions of concert, performance, and ritual. The powerful sound and stage presence of the group My Bloody Valentine also deepened my understanding of my relation to space. Since then, my vision has always been music based, and all my performances conceived as Albums.

## **QUESTION OF ORIGINS**

The question of origins haunts my work as if I were re-enacting the founding principles of theater.

*Theatron* the Greek word literally means the place where the spectator watches. Before your eyes, I place bodies and their singularity. This ancient experience of The Stage associates action and observation. It works like compression, and it engenders movements, intensifies their presence, liberating emotion. At this

very moment, an exchange occurs. My ego merges with everything on stage: bodies, voices, music, lights, and set. All that life offers flows from The Stage.

## **SACRED POWER**

I am deeply committed to the theatre. It is the ultimate place to exchange an original idea, where it reveals itself, and at the same time invents its own language. For me, what we call the live performing arts exist in a higher, sacred dimension, sacred not religious. If I have faith, it is in the sacred power of composition.

## **THEATRE**

The stage of the theater is the place where I bring what I have prepared. In French I use the word *plateau*; it means the stage, but also the tray used to bring food. I like the association with the kitchen. It is like cooking a meal, then sharing it. I am interested in an organic articulation between the stage and the audience. The performance materializes an idea in movement that vibrates in the present, and there, the audience attends its manifestation.

## **CHOICE OF TITLES**

The evocative power of titles invites an imaginary journey, travel to a performance to come. Instead of proposing a subject, at first the title intends to produce an effect. The title introduces. It is the first composition. A few years ago, I used long titles excerpted from romantic novels. Now I prefer short sentences as a device to set a story in motion, to aim at the shape on the horizon. I refer to the title of a novel by Patrick Modiano that I am very fond of. I do not begin to work with images but with elements of fiction that are full of possibilities, and I cannot begin without a title.

## **THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

At last, here it is!

It is very disturbing to notice that something always escapes our relation to the present time. The 21<sup>st</sup> century sounds a bit like science-fiction, doesn't it? The quickening pace of History demands that I examine my own practice: does The Body remain a subject for exploration? Do I have skill and means enough to perceive the present? I linger over Arthur Rimbaud's notion that "one has to be truly modern." At the same time, what moves me is the direct experience of the world.

The theatres are these spaces that maintain a direct, live relation to experience. No technology - even the most advanced - can replace it. To the people who tell me they have seen all my performances on the Internet, my reply is always the same, "You haven't seen anything yet!"

Christian Rizzo's comments recorded by Stéphane Malfettes in Lille, France, on December 20, 2011.

English translation by LUNCHEONETTE (May 2012)