Farid-ud-Din Attar’s Play: Conference of the Birds

Poet: Farid-ud-Din Attar
Director: Wendy Jehlen
Group: Anikaya, USA
Language: English (???)
Duration: 1 hr 20 mins

The Play
Conference of the Birds is an evening-length movement theatre work, conceived and directed by Wendy Jehlen and inspired by the epic poem of Farid ud Din Attar. It is a tale of a group of birds that set off in search of the mythical bird, the Simurgh. Many of the birds abandon the quest. When the remaining birds arrive in the land of the Simurgh, they find themselves reflected… they are the Simurgh. We use Attar’s text as a frame for narratives gathered from refugees and other migratory people, symbolizing the journey that we, the diversity that is humanity, take together. It is a story of found community, of the necessity of difference. Conference of the Birds has been supported by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, The Boston Foundation, Jacob’s Pillow, Arts Emerson, Theatre Communications Group, New Music/USA and National Endowment for the Arts.

Director’s Note
Conference of the Birds poses the question: How can we be

different together? The performance proposes an answer. Anikaya explores this question by translating contemporary migrant stories into dance. In the creation of the work, the company directly engaged with refugee and other migrant communities throughout the creative process. Through a community-based, artist-led process, we have created a framework within which a dynamic evolving presentation can happen – relevant to the moment. Conference of the Birds addresses many narratives at once. It addresses issues pertinent to religious and cultural minorities, gender and sexuality, refugees, and works to counteract xenophobia in its many manifestations – both in content and in the composition of the company. Re-contextualising this classical Sufi text illuminates current moment in history, bringing to full circle the idea that human history is a history of movement, mingling and entanglements.

The Director

Wendy Jehlen's career has been marked by international explorations, study and creative collaboration. Wendy engages in collaborations across languages, culture, media and genres. Her work questions the boundaries that we imagine between ourselves, and seeks to break down these imagined walls through an embodied practice of radical empathy. Her unique approach to choreography incorporates elements of Bharat Natyam, Odissi, Capoeira, Kalaripayattu, West African dance, Butoh, and a wide-range of contemporary movement forms. Her emotionally powerful choreography has been created and performed in the US, Canada, Italy, India, Japan, Brazil, Benin, Burkina Faso, Botswana, Mali and Turkey. Her works include Delicateness in Times of Brutality (2017), a duet with Deaf Butoh artist Dakei; Entangling (2015), a duet inspired by Quantum Entanglement; The Deep (2015), a work for 25 dancers created in Brazil; Lilith (2013), a solo on the first woman; The Knocking Within (2012), an evening-length duet on a disintegrating relationship; Forest (2010), a journey through the archetypal forest; and He Who Burns (2006).

The Poet

Abū Ḥamīd bin Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm, better known by his pen-name Farīd ud-Dīn Aṭṭār, was a Persian poet, theoretician of Sufism, and hagiographer from Nishapur who had an immense and lasting influence on Persian poetry and Sufism. Manṭiq-uṭ-Ṭayr (The Conference of the Birds) and Ilāhī-Nāma (The Book of Divine) are among his most famous works.

The Group

Anikaya's mission is to break down the perceived boundaries between people, cultures and art forms. Our work has so far extended to the US, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, France, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mali and Turkey. Anikaya weaves together music, dance and storytelling to create works that pull from the full range of the body's communicative capabilities. We incorporate traditional forms, internalizing them and then allowing them to reemerge as part of a new contemporary movement vocabulary. The result is work that is resonant of deep-rooted traditions, without being bound to any particular genre, place or practice. The ensemble includes performers from Benin, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, India/South Africa, Japan, Turkey and the US.

Cast & Credits

Dancers Ibrahim Abdo (Egypt), Yasin Anar (Turkey), Sarveshan Gangen (South Africa/India), Kae Ishimoto (Japan), Danang Pamungkas (Indonesia), Luciane Ramos da Silva (Brazil)

Music created by Fraction (Eric Raynaud) (France), Shaw Pong Liu (USA), Shaho Andalibi (Iran/Canada), Deraldo Ferreira (Brazil/USA)

Light Design Stephen Petrilli (USA)

Light execution Gregory Casparian (USA)

Projection Design David Bengali (USA)

Calligraphy artist
& content consultant Pouya Jahanshahi (Iran/USA)

Director/Choreographer Wendy Jehlen (USA)

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