Les Chants de l’Umaï

The Play

Les Chants de l’Umaï consists of five sequences, set in a surreal Indo-Arab context with Persian and Jewish influences, in which dance stems from singing in long undulating iterations, somewhat like the chants of ancient manuscripts. While creating this show, Marcia Barcellos was particularly inspired by the Carnatic songs and signifying gestures of Indian sacred dances. In the imaginary, dream-like state that Marcia Barcellos creates in this piece, she is Umaï, the womb of the universe, or a woman-dragon of the fictional territory of Gravbekistan. In this ode to femininity, the reconstructed memory of many fantasized imaginary divinities is conveyed through five songs loosely derived from Indian or African melodies. Each of them, in the manner of ancient theatre, introduces an epic poem of a past era that only the body-memory can tie us to. As a loyal disciple of American choreographer, Alwin Nikolais, Barcellos uses the whole gamut of effects, including video, lighting, holograms and props created by the co-founder of Systeme Castafiore, Karl Biscuit. The intersection of a movement vocabulary particular to Barcellos and ever-evolving scenography, *Les Chants de L’Umaï* goes as close as it can to a reimagined world.

Director’s note

“It’s an operatic form that combines singing and dancing, with a dramatic and scenic device to carry it all. The theme, a sort of distant past, reinvented or a prehistoric mythology revolves around feminity. *Umaï* is a word from the ancient Mongolian which means matrix. Through this form we created different women characters which form a kind of mythology of the origin of the world. Each piece is preceded by a song, in a mysterious language, which announces the next one, a bit like with the Greek chorus. We take the viewer on board of a

rather contemplative epic poem, with a great freedom of interpretation.”

The Director

Système Castafiore is directed by theatre director and musician Karl Biscuit and Brazilian dancer and choreographer Marcia Barcellos, both of whom, having worked with Alwin Nikolais, remain followers of his style of total dance-theatre in which dance is just one element in an integrated performance including sound, light and theatrical effects. They first entered the new French dance movement through the *Lolita collective*, before founding their own company in 1989. Together, they created 19 performances including choreographies for national ballets. Naturally gifted with humor, talent, imagination and a rare ingenuity, they put experimentation at the forefront of their art.

The Group

Dance company *Système Castafiore* has no equivalent on the French performing arts scene. Operating for over 30 years, it has created its own universe, flirting with Dadaism. Co-directed by choreographer Marcia Barcellos and director/composer Karl Biscuit, the company’s representation of reality reflects the madness of our world through an extraordinary work of experimentation between movement, sophisticated projections and sound installations.

Dance & Songs: Marcia Barcellos

Music & Direction: Karl Biscuit