

# 12/Dance

## Brave New World

Physical and virtual realities interact in "Metapolis II"

BY BRIAN MCCORMICK

Art, be it digital or analog, has always addressed a set of core issues — the aesthetics of representation and perception, the human condition as it changes due to cultural and political developments, the emotional and spiritual realm, and the individual's relation to society and community. Art will always reflect on cultural change and technologies are an important part of the transformation of culture.

Like the Wooster Group and William Forsyth, theater director, choreographer, and provocateur Frédéric Flamand, the artistic director of Ballet National de Marseille, is acutely interested in projecting this change forward, as evidenced by "Metapolis II," an evening-length piece that has been garnering critical raves in Europe since its original presentation in 2000 for Charleroi Danse/Plan K, Flamand's former ensemble.

Bringing the company to the United States for the first time under his direction, Flamand stages the North American premiere of "Metapolis II," created in collaboration with the renowned



Ballet National De Marseille performs the North American premiere of "Metapolis II" July 25-27 as part of Lincoln Center Festival 2007.

Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid. Set on a futuristic landscape drenched in shifting hues of radiant blue and green light, the high-energy work elegantly synthesizes video created in real time with the dancers' moving bodies and Hadid's interconnected silver sculptures.

In 2004, to much surprise, Flamand, a Belgian avant-garde artist in experimental theater and modern dance was named artistic director of Ballet National De Marseilles, one of France's national companies, founded by choreographer Roland Petit. Flamand, who had previously worked with artists including Robert Wilson, William Burroughs, Philippe Decoufflé, Marie Chouinard, as well as Joy Division and the Eurhythmics, introduced a new aesthetic to the company's traditional ballet vocabulary.

His fascination with the relationship between the human body and the physical environment has led to the creation of several dances featuring designs by noted architects. With American architect Thom Mayne, he made "Silent Collisions," inspired by Italo Calvino's "Invisible Cities." With French architect Dominique Perrault, he created "La Cité Radieuse," a critical look at Le Corbusier's functionalist/rationalist utopia, in which dancers manipulated elements of onstage urban constructions.

And in 1996, Flamand made "Mov-

### BALLET NATIONAL DE MARSEILLE

"Metapolis II"  
New York State Theater  
63rd St. at Broadway  
Jul. 25-27 8 p.m.  
\$50, \$70; 212-721-6500

ing Target" with New Yorkers Elisabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofno, the design team behind the redevelopment of Lincoln Center.

In "Metapolis II," which has been reworked since its first performances, the essential theme is contemporary urban life, but one in which the virtual

features as prominently as the real. It is, for all intents and purposes, a large-scale digital

environment, an architectural model that explores electronic and movement-based interfaces, an artful rendering—or projecting forward—of what our technologically and physically mediated lives look like. If only our costumes and edifices all looked like those designed by Hadid—sensual, complex, integrated.

Throughout the intellectually and physically robust 70-minute piece, the three silver arches are moved and reconfigured by the dancers, a reflection of the pace of urban development, and how humans endlessly, progressively adapt. While the extra effects are at times over-stimulating, it is an accurate representation of what it's like to be living in an evolving mega-metropolis of the 21st century.

An interview with Frédéric Flamand, p. 19