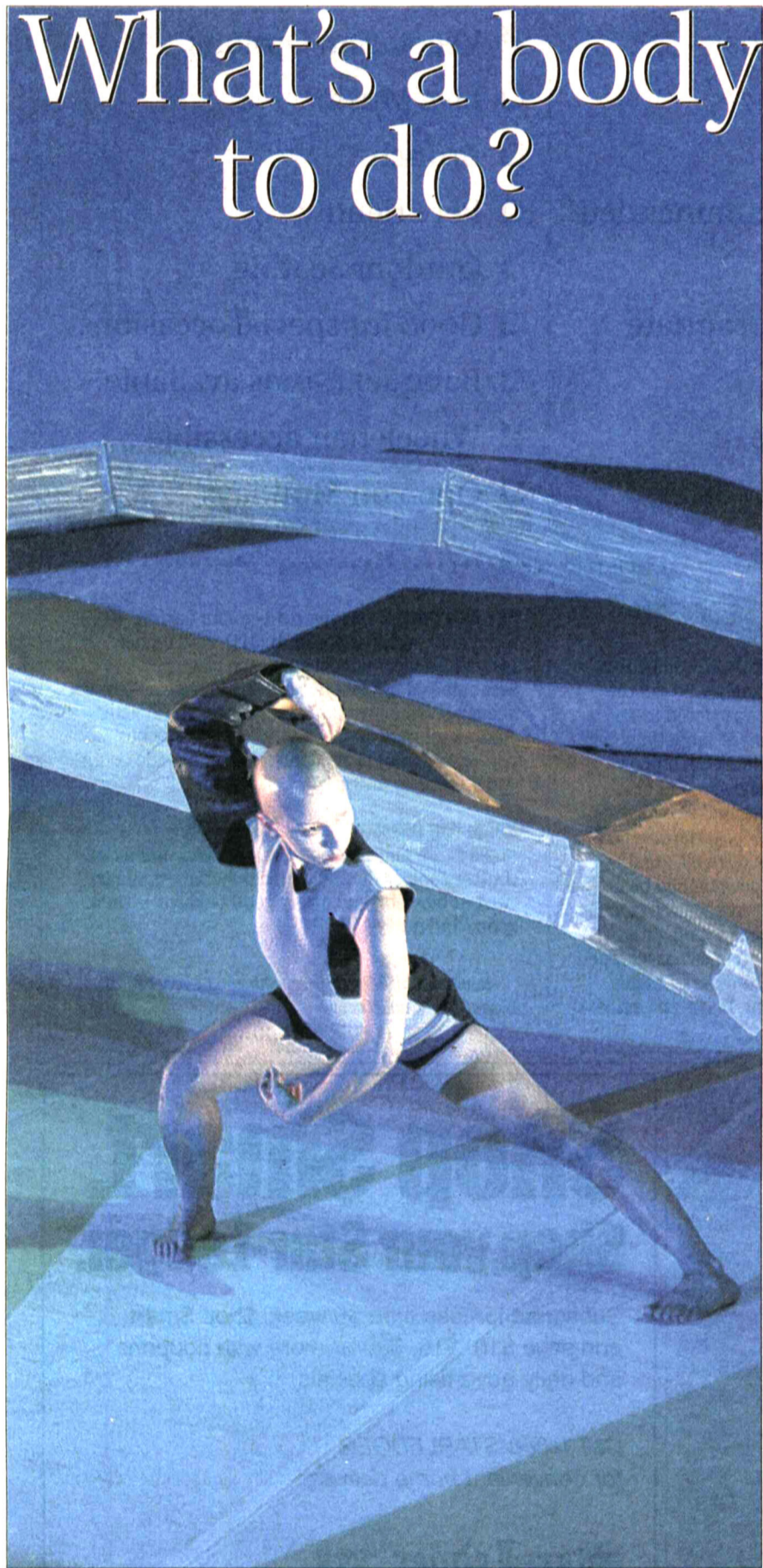


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What's a body to do?



PHOTOS BY PINO PIPITONE

Choreographer Frédéric Flamand, who with architect Zaha Hadid created the figures above and at right, says that "architects are not only interested in making buildings, but also in people, philosophy and human relations."

Moving through the modern world . . . and ever so creatively

DANCE

Ballet National de Marseille

Where: New York State Theater at Lincoln Center, 63rd Street and Columbus Avenue, New York

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday through July 27

How much: \$50-\$70. Call (212) 721-6500 or visit www.LincolnCenter.org

BY ROBERT JOHNSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

NEW YORK — Looking at the world today, choreographer and director Frédéric Flamand sees humanity under pressure everywhere.

As the population soars and cities sprawl, the world's inhabitants have become increasingly corralled, controlled, bombarded by media images and subject to novel stresses. At the same time, the boundary between reality and fantasy appears to dissipate ever further.

Flamand has made this insane modern world the subject of a dance. "Metapolis II," a provocative evening-length work that his Ballet National de Marseille brings to the Lincoln Center Festival next week, takes as its subject the environmental conditions that define life in the 21st century. By reflecting the experience of the growing millions of urban dwellers and suburbanites, "Metapolis" (which might be translated as "the city beyond" or "the city of the future") strives to give viewers an authentic snapshot of their surroundings, and possibly a vision of tomorrow.

Yet Flamand is also interested in dramatic contrasts, such as the gap between huge urban spaces and intimacy. The body's fragility and its resilience, and our restless desire for freedom also inform "Metapolis." Where is the human body, that archaic organism, supposed to hide in a landscape overrun with shopping malls and highways?

"Dance is perhaps the most beautiful and poetic media to speak about the world today," Flamand says, because he feels the body illustrates humanity's plight so eloquently.

"Metapolis II" is actually the second version of this dance, which Flamand created in Charleroi, Belgium, seven years ago, in collaboration with Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid. Flamand rechoreographed the dance to incorporate the classical technique of the dancers in Marseilles, where he became director in 2004.

Flamand had been working with architectural designers for several years, and Hadid is known for her concerns with integrated urban landscapes and traffic patterns.

"All her architecture starts from movement," Flamand says, adding that "architects are not only interested in making buildings, but also in people, philosophy and human relations."

The writings of anthropologist Marc Augé, author of "Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity," have been another important influence. Augé focuses on the transitional spaces, like airport lounges, that take up more and more room in our lives. Yet the choreographer says he did not set out to prove a theory, but rather wants "to create emotion or present a critical point of view."

For "Metapolis," Hadid designed three aluminum bridges, which the dancers reconfigure continuously, offering viewers ever fresh perspectives. She also designed costumes made of a material using blue-screen technology.

Technicians videotaped the dancers, then superimposed images of buildings and automobiles onto their bodies. During "Metapolis," those altered videos are projected onto an upstage screen. "The idea was to make a poetic exchange between the city and the body. The body begins to be urban, and the city begins to be corporeal," says Flamand, who adds that another goal was to make the stage space appear to dance.

An accompanying musical collage features contrasting works by Magnus Lindberg



and Olivier Messiaen; or Future Sound of London and traditional Irish music, for instance. The lone figure of violinist and composer George Van Dam adds pathos to the whizzing, ultra-modern scene.

Ultimately, "Metapolis" may be about transcending the city's limitations. Human beings, Flamand observes, always search for freedom, breaking rules and altering their environment, and creating alternative, personal spaces wherever they go.

Says Flamand, "People, in fact, are always stronger than the building where they live."

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