

ELLE

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FIRSTBUZZ

French twist:
Preljocaj's *Paysage*
Après la Bataille



BARRE HOPPING

New York turns into Paris on the Hudson

This month signals the arrival of what may be France's most anticipated cultural export since Truffaut et al. launched the New Wave. For two action-packed weeks, New Yorkers will be chasing up- and downtown, eager participants in "France Moves," a dance festival with a difference. In addition to performances by ten companies (five hitting our shores for the very first time), there's a crop of new dance films, an exhibition of choreographer portraits, and—to deconstruct and analyze it all—a series of stimulating panel discussions. Call it a dance-language immersion course.

A longtime home-away-from-home for American choreographers like Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Steve Paxton, whose distinctly antiheroic ideas about movement found a rapt and uniquely supportive audience, France is in the throes of reinventing its own dance traditions. "It used to be that everybody was a swan or a prince," says Yorgos Loukos, head of the adventurous Lyon Opera Ballet and the festival's artistic director. "These days, everyday movement is more important. Choreography is about the guy in the street, less stylized and a lot closer to reality." It's a dramatic shift, brought about in large part by an increasingly multicultural French society. The choreographers themselves, several from places as farflung as Cameroon, Albania, Spain, and Hungary, represent the new demographics. This is dance without borders, from Compagnie Montalvo-Hervieu's crazy-quilt combos of hip-hop, flamenco, ballet, African, and baroque forms to Angelin Preljocaj's easy meld of classical and postmodern sensibilities, seen a few years ago in his intriguingly complex *La Stravangaza* for the New York City Ballet. "Our choreographers look to all the arts around," Loukos says, "to architecture, painting, the black theater of Prague, film, commedia dell'arte, German Expressionism, the circus. And they're influenced by everyone, from Chaplin and Keaton to Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan."

Maguy Marin, the child of Spanish immigrants and, at forty-nine, the most senior of the group, has been distilling her vision of humanity for more than two decades, winning the ardor of American audiences with pieces like *Cendrillon* (a newfangled "Cinderella"). Marin's new trio, *Pour Ainsi Dire* ("So to Speak"), continues her exploration of "the poetry of everyday life," as Loukos calls it. "Her work, so precisely conceived and executed, has no strict narration, no beginning or end. Every gesture has its own music."

Informed by Marin's theatricality, yet guided by an aesthetic all his own, twenty-eight-year-old Boris Charmatz creates dances that look to the future while acknowledging the past. "There is no dance without connotations," Charmatz says. "If we perform naked, we are part of a history of art, where there's a lot of nakedness." Motivated by what his ideas might inspire, the festival's youngest choreographer throws his dances open to interpretation, a clear reflection of France's burgeoning choreographic confidence. "Maybe you will see a party, or dead bodies from World War II," he says. "Or maybe you will see a moment when the movement has almost disappeared. It might be sarcastic or serious. I don't keep an eye on it. I am deep inside." For information, go to www.francemoves.com.—LISE FRIEDMAN

DANCE