



Conference
of the
Birds

“a new contemporary language –
muscular, luxuriously weighted and
full-bodied, chockful of gestural
flourishes, and kinetically courageous.”
-The Boston Globe



In the Spring of 2018, with support from a Building Bridges grant from the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, a Live Arts Boston grant from The Boston Foundation, a commission from the Boston Center for the Arts, and a Pillow Lab residency from Jacob's Pillow and an In the Lab grant from Theater Communications Group, ANIKAYA Dance Theater premiered *The Conference of the Birds*. *Conference of the Birds* is an evening-length movement theater work inspired by the epic poem of Farid Ud din Attar, and embodying stories gathered from modern-day refugees and other migrants.

The cast is made up of dancers from around the world who share a culture of travel, and who each represent a unique cultural tradition. Collaborating dancers include artists from Benin, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, India/South Africa, China, Japan, Turkey and the US. The dancers were selected for their individual artistry and cultural expertise, their individual life stories and for their interest in and facility with inter-cultural collaboration. Original music was composed for the work by Shaw Pong Liu (US), Eric Raynaud/Fraction (France), and Shahou Andalibi (Iran). Animated projection art was created by David Bengali (US).

The Conference of the Birds 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 *Conference* as a frame for narratives gathered from refugees, symbolizing the journey that we, the diversity that is humanity, take together. It is a story of found community, of the necessity of difference.

Ensemble:

YASIN ANAR *Turkey*

SARVESHAN GANGEN *South Africa/India*

MARCEL GBEFFA *Benin*

CHING-I CHANG *Taiwan/US*

WENDY JEHLLEN *US*

DANANG PAMUNGKAS *Indonesia*

LUCIANE RAMOS *Brazil*

IBRAHIM ABDO *Egypt*

YOUSEF SBIEH *Palestine*

Creative Team:

Concept & Direction:

WENDY JEHLLEN

Music Composition:

SHAW PONG LIU *US*

SHAHOU ANDALIBI *Iran*

SANDY SINGH *India*

Projection Design:

DAVID BENGALI *US*

Calligraphy:

POUYA JAHANSHAHI *US*

Light Design:

ANIKA NAYAK *US*

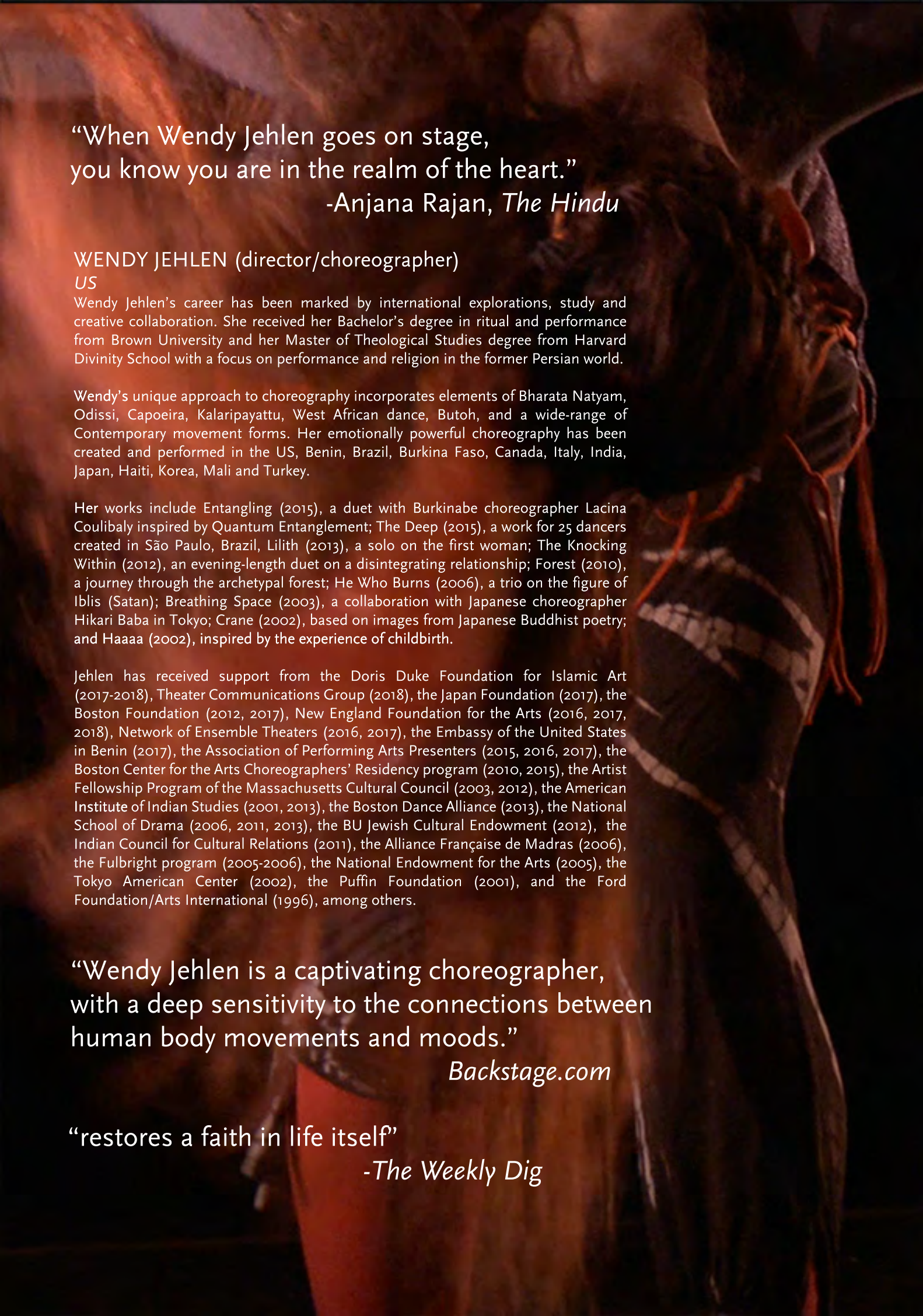
Set Design:

ANTON UHL *US*

BLAKE EVITT *US*

JEFFREY MANSFIELD *US*





“When Wendy Jehlen goes on stage,
you know you are in the realm of the heart.”

-Anjana Rajan, *The Hindu*

WENDY JEHLLEN (director/choreographer)

US

Wendy Jehlen's career has been marked by international explorations, study and creative collaboration. She received her Bachelor's degree in ritual and performance from Brown University and her Master of Theological Studies degree from Harvard Divinity School with a focus on performance and religion in the former Persian world.

Wendy's unique approach to choreography incorporates elements of Bharata 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, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Italy, India, Japan, Haiti, Korea, Mali and Turkey.

Her works include *Entangling* (2015), a duet with Burkinabe choreographer Lacina Coulibaly inspired by Quantum Entanglement; *The Deep* (2015), a work for 25 dancers created in São Paulo, 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; *He Who Burns* (2006), a trio on the figure of Iblis (Satan); *Breathing Space* (2003), a collaboration with Japanese choreographer Hikari Baba in Tokyo; *Crane* (2002), based on images from Japanese Buddhist poetry; and *Haaaa* (2002), inspired by the experience of childbirth.

Jehlen has received support from the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (2017-2018), Theater Communications Group (2018), the Japan Foundation (2017), the Boston Foundation (2012, 2017), New England Foundation for the Arts (2016, 2017, 2018), Network of Ensemble Theaters (2016, 2017), the Embassy of the United States in Benin (2017), the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (2015, 2016, 2017), the Boston Center for the Arts Choreographers' Residency program (2010, 2015), the Artist Fellowship Program of the Massachusetts Cultural Council (2003, 2012), the American Institute of Indian Studies (2001, 2013), the Boston Dance Alliance (2013), the National School of Drama (2006, 2011, 2013), the BU Jewish Cultural Endowment (2012), the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (2011), the Alliance Française de Madras (2006), the Fulbright program (2005-2006), the National Endowment for the Arts (2005), the Tokyo American Center (2002), the Puffin Foundation (2001), and the Ford Foundation/Arts International (1996), among others.

“Wendy Jehlen is a captivating choreographer,
with a deep sensitivity to the connections between
human body movements and moods.”

Backstage.com

“restores a faith in life itself”

-The Weekly Dig



The company directly engaged with refugee and other immigrant 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.

The work of ANIKAYA is the breaking open of stories, digging through layers of meaning, and then adding new layers. In her work, ANIKAYA Artistic Director Wendy Jehlen often combines stories, art forms, and traditions that would seem to be unrelated or even in opposition to each other. The perception of opposition is exactly that, a perception. The act of juxtaposing seemingly unrelated ideas and stories, reveals intrinsic relationships between them, and allows more profound understanding of each of the elements involved. Recontextualizing this classical Sufi text illuminates both its historical meanings and our current moment in history, bringing full circle the idea that human history is a history of movement, mingling and entanglements.

The performance is visual theater in form, with all narrative being danced as well as spoken/sung in the soundscape. The narrative is non-linear and many-layered, with stories interspersed with and told through a movement language drawing on the extremely diverse bodies and cultural movement vocabulary of the dancers.



"A man whose eyes love risks his soul -
His dancing breaks beyond the mind's control"
- *Conference of the Birds*



Conference of the Birds has been supported by:
The Embassy of the United States in Beijing
Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art
Institut Français in India
Japan Foundation in India
Boston Center for the Arts
Jacob's Pillow
Theater Communications Group
New England Foundation for the Arts
Boston Cultural Council
Massachusetts Cultural Council
New Music/USA
The Boston Foundation
The Cricket Foundation
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and donors to ANIKAYA Dance Diplomacy



ANIKAYA

67 Dane St
Somerville, MA 02143
USA
ph: +1 617 861 7930
wendyjehlen@anikaya.org
www.anikaya.org

Wendy Jehlen of Anikaya brings together some very skilled and powerful dancers



Sharon Lowen

focus

■ Anikaya's *Conference of the Birds* is as difficult to translate into words as it is difficult to capture a breathtaking panorama of nature with a simple camera. That is as it should be. The dance communicates in its own language through bodies that connect us to hearing the whispers of our own, through theirs.

Conference of the Birds, presented by Wendy Jehlen's Anikaya dance company during the NSD's 21st International Theatre Festival, is a experience we all hope for when we enter a theatre, one that takes us on an emotional and visceral journey that can shift the imprints in our core.

It's difficult to know where to be in talking about this remarkably moving production, created by a team of artistes from 10 countries and five continents. We are mesmerised by a diverse group of dancers exploring answers to the question: How can we be different together? The answer is framed in the fluid context of Farid ud Din Attar's epic Sufiana poem of a group of birds in search of the mythical Simurgh bird; some giving up, others reflected and becoming the Simurgh.

The metaphor of people in migration, including refugees, mirrors our journeys as humanity creating communities over eons. In the process of creation, the entire company as well as director engaged with these communities in an artiste-led process.

The company's name Anikaya means grace/gift of the body combining Hebrew (*ann*: gift), Persian (*i-a*: of) and Sanskrit (*kaya*: body). Delhi's movement theatre work brought together dancers from Egypt, Turkey, South African Indians, Japan, Indonesia, Brazil and the US. The movement language of these varied bodies sensitively mingled and refracted to flying through the space, elevations and each other to touch on issues of religious and cultural minorities, gender and sexuality, refugees and xenophobia.

Dancer/director Wendy Jehlen is no stranger to Delhi, or India for that matter. Her studies of various Indian performance traditions and research comparing *abhinaya* and sign language, women on stage in India and the US and projects including on the Rani of Jhansi have been supported by USIEF Fulbright programs, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the National School of Drama, ICCR, Chennai Alliance Francaise. She's performed and given workshops from Delhi to Kalakshetra, Trissur, Bengaluru and Pondicherry to Roorki, and of course equally internationally.

Each member of Wendy's ensemble brings an amazing background that informs of the richness of their collaborative work. Brazilian Luciane Ramos Silva is a dancer, choreographer,

anthropologist and cultural organiser with a doctorate in performing arts/dance researching the notions of coloniality in dance. She initiated and developed movement and training focusing on blackness and the body in African and African diasporic communities. Her solo "Eyes at my back and a smile at the corner of my lips" was presented in North Carolina and Sao Francisco and she is the artistic director of the São Paulo-based performance group Diaspóros Coletivo das Artes.

Egyptian Ibrahim Abd El Hamid Ibrahim Ahmed is a director, choreographer and dancer who began acting and dancing while earning his BA in Philosophy from Cairo University. He joined the first interdisciplinary music theatre group in Cairo and concurrently began his own movement research on the flow of the movement in the body from a contemporary point of view of Sufi whirling and incorporating the concept of free fall. He conducted residencies at Alanus University, Germany to learn more about the concept of the flow as understood in the Eurythmie studies. Recently he has started to reflect more on his home cultures as Egyptian, African, Middle Eastern and the Mediterranean resulting in the world premiere of "Green Leaves are Gone", a work choreographed in collaboration between Egyptian and Italian choreographers at the Inteatre Festival.

All the dancers are highly skilled and powerful dancers, none more so than the petite Kae Ishimoto from Japan. She was

born into a family of traditional Japanese dancers, studied jazz dance at age four, and onward in modern and contemporary dance performing with many international artistes. She was introduced to Butoh by great masters and has been invited to 19 countries in Asia, Europe and the US as a Butoh artiste. Her solo Butoh dance "Transformation Girl" using the Hijikata method of Butoh, was seen in seven countries in Asia and Europe. She has worked to construct an original, genre-less expression that synthesises various elements and traditions of dance and organised intensive workshops and events in 12 countries including Japan, UK, Hong Kong, Bali and Mexico City.

Most dance companies have a relatively homogeneous background but the diversity of the Anikaya group demands a spotlight on each. Born in Solo, Indonesia, Danang Pamungkas studied traditional Javanese dance at the Mangkunegaran Palace of Surakarta, and graduated from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Surakarta. He was a member of the renowned Cloud Gate Dance Company of Taiwan for several years. Danang's own choreography was awarded first prize at the Next Wave Indonesian Choreographer in Jakarta, and he performed at major festivals across Indonesia, Austria, Singapore as well as during a six-month residency program in New City and a six-week sum-

mer program at American Dance Festival, Durham with a grant from the Asian Cultural Council.

Sarveshan Gangen is recognisable to Indian dance cognizati as he is a Bharatanatyam artiste from Cape Town (South Africa), currently based in Chennai. He started at three under the guidance of Savitri Naidoo (disciple of Indira Rajan) at the Vadhini Indian Arts Academy in Cape Town and, post Arangetram under Sandya Murali (disciple of the Dhanajayans), he moved to Chennai to train with the Dhananjayans as well as Karaikudi Subramanian, Leela Samson and others. Sarveshan is recognised as a nuanced performer, a thought-provoking teacher and an innovative choreographer who has given scores of performances in leading theatres in South Africa, India and abroad.

Turkish contemporary dancer Yasin Anar is not only a graduate of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University State Conservatory in contemporary dance but also holds a certificate as a Master Trainer in Turkish traditional folk dance. He has danced with a number of contemporary dance companies in Turkey and abroad including the UK-based Aakash Odedra Dance Company.

Just as the dancers create a community through movement, the collaborating multi-dimensional artistes of the music, projections,

graphics have amazing stories that would far exceed my space and perhaps your time to read. Violinist and composer Shaw Pong Liu is from the US. Fraction (Eric Raynaud) is a French music composer and digital art creative designer living in Paris, composer Shahou Andalibi from Iran/Canada learned/performed Persian classical singing and Maqam music from the age of four under his father, Iraj Andalibi a well-known Persian musician. Projection artiste and Lighting designer David Bengali is based in New York while Iranian-American graphic designer and content consultant Pouya Jahanshahi is an assistant professor at Oklahoma State University.

Anikaya's *Conference of the Birds* is as difficult to translate into words as it is difficult to capture a breathtaking panorama of nature with a simple camera. That is as it should be. The dance communicates in its own language through bodies that connect us to hearing the whispers of our own, through theirs. The intensity, the gentleness widens our personal visceral knowledge through the honesty and wisdom of the choreography. If one allows oneself to be drawn in, and it is hard not to — it is like a meditation of awareness of the shared breath of humanity.

Sharon Lowen is a respected exponent of Odissi, Manipuri and Mayurbhanj and Seraikella Chau whose four-decade career in India was preceded by 17 years of modern dance and ballet in the US and an MA in dance from the University of Michigan. She can be contacted at sharonlowen-workshop@gmail.com



All the dancers are highly skilled and powerful dancers, none more so than the petite Kae Ishimoto from Japan





DANCE REVIEW

A gathering of dancers for 'Conference of the Birds'



LIZA VOLL

"Conference of the Birds" is the latest work by ANIKAYA Dance Theater choreographer-dancer Wendy Jehlen.

By Karen Campbell

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 07, 2018

ANIKAYA Dance Theater choreographer-dancer Wendy Jehlen is a world traveler, and along the way she gathers ideas, reflections, images. For her latest work, "Conference of the Birds," which premiered at Boston Center for the Arts Thursday, she has also gathered seven

remarkable performers from seven different countries. For this “Ancient Story | Modern Journey,” each contributes unique movement reflective of deep cultural traditions: Marcel Gbeffa (Benin); Luciane Ramos-Silva (Brazil); Mohammed Yousry “Shika” (Egypt); Kae Ishimoto (Japan); Danang Pamungkas (Indonesia); K. Sarveshan Gangen (India/South Africa); and Yasin Anar (Turkey).

Subtly interweaving these influences, Jehlen and the dancers have collectively created a kind of new contemporary language — muscular, luxuriously weighted and full-bodied, chockful of gestural flourishes, and kinetically courageous. These dancers are as willing to hang from scaffolding and catapult themselves onto raised platforms as they are to throw themselves onto the floor.

It's all in the service of a kind of allegory of an allegory. The work is based on a 12th-century Iranian poem of the same name that recounts the journey of a group of birds toward enlightenment. They arrive only to find the holy in their own reflections, realizing that the whole is attained only through the unity of all their distinctive qualities. This becomes a frame for suggesting the necessity for diversity in modern life, through the breaking down of barriers between cultures, through the embrace of the refugee.

So much of the rich imagery powerfully lingers. A man repeatedly tries to scale a resolute wall of people. A woman streaks across stage only to be snagged each time by someone moving in the opposite direction. A feral, curious mating dance casts two men, their faces inches apart as they move, into constant changes of perspective. A line of seated dancers, outstretched legs entwined, bow and stretch, arms sweeping fluidly forward and back in ritual supplication. And woven throughout are a flowing expanse of arms suggesting the wings of birds. They create a poignant final tableau as they mass, arms reaching toward the light.

Gestating in Jehlen's fertile mind for over two decades, “Conference of the Birds” came to fruition in partnership with the BCA, which was awarded a Building Bridges program grant from the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. See it. It will remind you of the importance of creating connections between cultures, not walls.

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DOCU DRAMA MOVIES

‘The Conference of the Birds’ – a dance recital inspired by a 12th century Sufi poem

**Kunal Ray**

SEPTEMBER 07, 2018 17:45 IST

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A rehearsal of 'The Conference of the Birds'.

Moments from a dance rehearsal come together to tell the human story

Boston-based Wendy Jehlen founded Anikaya Dance Theater in 1998. Through wide-ranging productions, she has constantly endeavoured to break the boundaries between people, culture and art forms. Jehlen is deeply interested in the communicative possibilities of the body. Her choreography incorporates elements of Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kalaripayattu, Butoh, West African dance and a range of contemporary movement forms.

To put things in perspective, she writes on the Anikaya website, “We incorporate traditional forms, internalizing them and then allowing them to re-emerge as part of a new movement vocabulary. The result is a work that is resonant of deep-rooted traditions, without being bound to any particular genre, place or practice.”

The divine king

In the spring of 2018, with support from various grants, and commissioned by the Boston Center for the Arts, Anikaya Dance Theater premiered ‘The Conference of the Birds’, an evening-length movement theatre work inspired by *Mantiq-ut-Tair*, a 12th century epic poem by legendary Sufi mystic poet Farid ud-Din Attar.

In the allegorical poem, 30 birds from all over the world embark on an arduous journey to find their divine king, the mythical bird Simorgh, who resides on Qaf Mountain. On reaching the destination, the birds realise they themselves are the Simorgh – they find divinity in their collective selves. The poem’s contemporary rendition, however, as helmed by Jehlen and others, embodies stories gathered from modern-day refugees and other migrants. Eight dancers, from Brazil, the U.S., Benin, Turkey, South Africa/ India, Indonesia, Egypt and Japan, were invited to a five-week residency in Boston where they worked with Jehlen to execute their collective vision of the poem.

Filmmaker Bijoyini Chatterjee and her editor husband Juan Carlos went to record the final performance of ‘The Conference of the Birds’. They also ended up making a 20-minute process film (of the same name, released in June this year) that captures various moments from the rehearsal and almost unveils the choreographic process. While non-fiction music and dance films abound, there are very few that document the creation of the choreography itself. In its making, the film also acquires a work-in-progress quality. While the dancers are trying to create choreography, the filmmakers pursue a film. Both are unsure about the end result.

Chatterjee, trained in flamenco and Bharatanatyam, was also concerned about capturing and adapting dance to a two-dimensional space. She says her previous work with dance and dancers helped her to be mindful of subjects moving in front of the camera.

Dance as idiom

The film is evocative and shows how different bodies, styles and points of view are fused to execute a unified vision. It shows the dancers, including Jehlen, huddled together in discussion, making spot improvisations, helping others navigate limitations, and also teaching each other their respective styles. You understand that collaboration ought to be an inclusive process where all participants are heard and opinions equally valued. The film and the final performance thus are polyphonic artworks echoing multiple voices, styles and

dance idioms.

The opening visual is particularly striking; the viewers are confronted with different ethnicities represented by the dancers. To highlight difference and its gradual extinction in the collaborative process is perhaps the *raison d'être* of the film and the project. Soon, the dancers are seen in their home contexts, practising various movements in preparation for the workshop. This to me is a visually striking moment as you encounter difference that gradually disappears to create a shared vision. And it is easier said than done.

The essential story that the film is trying to narrate is that of interdependence, that all our stories come together to form the human story, that each of our stories matter. This is the reality of the current political and media landscape, and one that is often, if not almost always, hidden.

A foodie and cinephile, the writer teaches literary and cultural studies at Pune's FLAME University.

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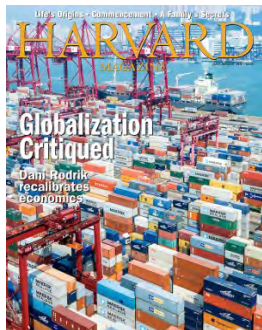


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<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/the-conference-of-the-birds-a-dance-recital-inspired-by-a-12th-century-sufi-poem/article24894412.ece>

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MONTAGE

Dance in Translation

Choreographer Wendy Jehlen's "dance diplomacy"

by MARINA N. BOLOTNIKOVA

JULY-AUGUST 2019

Dance theater company ANIKAYA's *The Conference of the Birds* explores movement, self-knowledge, and human interdependence.

Photograph by Gary Alpert

WHEN Wendy Jehlen, M.T.S. '00, improvises dance, *bharatanatyam* comes out. The choreographer and dancer was trained in the South Indian classical genre from age seven or eight; while she didn't become a *bharatanatyam* performer, its dizzying footwork and winding gestures are unmistakable in her work, a part of how her body naturally moves.



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Her most recent production, *The Conference of the Birds*, based on the twelfth-century Persian Sufi poem of the same name, might at first bewilder viewers. Combining movement from South Indian dance, Brazilian capoeira, and a long list of other sources, the piece doesn't represent contemporary dance as most people know it, or a mere fusion of styles. Instead it reflects the philosophy of Jehlen's Boston-based dance company, ANIKAYA, which seeks to remove what she calls the "imagined barriers" between people, culture, and art around the world. "Imagined" is the key word for Jehlen. "I hate the idea of crossing borders, because they're nonexistent. I can't really understand the idea that cultures are separate or that they are monoliths," she says. "It's visibly not true."



Wendy Jehlen

Photograph by Marcel Gbeffa

In some ways, *The Conference of the Birds*, which is all about people's inseparability and interdependence, has been a lifelong endeavor. Jehlen grew up in a half-Jewish family in Somerville, Massachusetts, where it always felt natural and right to see immigrants from across the world who looked different from one another and spoke different languages and understood the world differently—for her, culture was a continuous process of mixing and reconstituting. Her aunt was a *bharatanatyam* dancer, and watching her perform, Jehlen recalls, was like a "religious experience." Jehlen went to Brown to study something "very Brown," she says, a self-directed major called "Storytelling and Survival: Ritual and

Performance as Guardians of Culture." After taking time off to dance in India, she enrolled at Harvard Divinity School in 1997 to learn Persian and study Sufi literature (and to access Harvard's dance studios). She founded ANIKAYA—a blend of the Hebrew *an* (gift), the Persian *i* (of), and the Sanskrit *kaya* (body)—around the same time, as a vehicle for her various dance projects.

Jehlen says she always knew she was born to dance, and her career has combined the styles she learned growing up with genres from Japan, West Africa, and those of the many dancers she has traveled around the world to recruit. She calls the work "dance diplomacy"—but resists the concept of "fusion," as though it were a process of randomly gluing together elements from different genres. "It's important to me to learn something so thoroughly that it becomes part of your body," she explains: to understand how each dance form uses the body, the deep relationships and symbols and meanings behind every movement and gesture. Humans are wired to be moved by dance, she says, but that doesn't mean dance is a "universal language." When Jehlen creates choreography with her partners, she emphasizes, "It's not about the superficial aspect of the art form. We're meeting at the core of the art form, not at the, 'How do you move your hands?'"

The evening-length *Conference of the Birds* begins with its eight dancers (each from a different country) moving across the stage in full-bodied, synchronized flight, their arms evoking something between avian and human—as powerful and light as a bird's wings. In the background, projections fill a screen with sketches of birds, text, and pieces of passports and visas, representing the violence of borders. The poem on which the show is based, by Farid ud-Din Attar, tells a spiritual, searching story about the birds of the world on a perilous quest to find their sovereign, Simorgh. In the end, the birds discover that they themselves, together, are the Simorgh; a Persian folk etymology translates the word to "30 (*si*) birds (*morph*)."

"It's actually based on a Sanskrit text, which is probably based on something even older," Jehlen says. "This is a story that's been with humanity for thousands of years: these questions of traveling, traveling together, traveling across, and of the necessity of all of our stories." (The production premiered in Boston last year, and a weekend of performances in Washington, D.C., is planned for November. Jehlen is seeking funding to tour it around the country and the world. Grant-writing, she acknowledges, is a punishing endeavor of its own: sometimes "as time-intensive as creating art.")



"Sink into it": ballet choreographer Claudia Schreier, profiled



Elizabeth Claire Walker, from the Los Angeles Ballet to Harvard and back

Some artists can think back to the moment they knew that music or dance or poetry was what they were meant to do. Jehlen resists origin stories. "I have no idea why things happen," she insists. "I think it was probably my aunt," she offers. "I really don't know." She's reluctant to provide an explanation for her pursuits, perhaps partly because she doesn't view her work as marked by any particular interest in a specific tradition—*bharatanatyam* or Sufi mysticism or the Japanese dance-theater form *butoh*—but instead by the larger, mysterious, interconnected human experience. ANIKAYA has also produced works inspired by the Hebrew Bible; the concept of gender; and the idea, common to world religions and modern physics, of a time before creation. "To me, physics is as awesome and fascinating as anything else," she says. "I live for awe, and that's very strong in the parts of Islam that I'm interested in. I live for cognitive dissonance and things that force you to wrap your head around other things."



Jehlen as a starling in the "valley of bewilderment," one of seven the birds must pass through on their search for Simorgh in *The Conference of the Birds*

Photograph by Gary Alpert

For Jehlen, it's important that performances convey a specific emotional experience to viewers. Contemporary dance, she says, often focuses more on self-expression or exploring movement itself, and less on content. "My work is very much about content.... We want viewers to understand it in the way we intend." Next year, she hopes to tour with Sholeh Wolpé, the Iranian-American poet and playwright who translated the most recent English version of *The Conference of the Birds*. Wolpé would read a condensed version of the story before the performance, to give viewers a frame for understanding the dance.

"I think our work as artists is to train people to be empathetic," Jehlen adds. Though she doesn't often address it directly, she also thinks about the connection between her work and current culture and politics. "People get so much more attached to their identity when they perceive themselves as under attack. It can be a dangerous situation culturally because it makes you want to freeze your culture and label everything and separate everything." But as Jehlen knows, the intersections of culture can be every bit as magical, and generative, as their core.

Festival Diary: An Ongoing Drama Linking Theatre to Life

Pankhuri Zaheer 11 Feb 2020

Friday's change of pace

Contemporary dance performance, *Conference of the Birds* choreographed by Wendy Jehlen—deploys birds as a metaphor for migration. That's a topic the country is wrestling with and debates around citizenship and refugees and religious, cultural and economic discrimination are raging. The audience is primed for the theme, but it is the production, a feat in choreography and set design, that sets Jehlen's work apart.

The minimalist set comprises three perches for seven dancers [birds], one slightly more elaborate than the other two. The three screens making up the backdrop are as critical to the choreography as the dancers themselves.

An injured bird slowly flaps his wings; other birds flock to help it. In the backdrop, beautiful birds take flight. This harmony is violently shattered by a sequence of two birds being violently torn apart. The dancers form an insurmountable wall at stage centre, which a lone bird tries repeatedly to scale, getting pushed back brutally.

Where have we seen such scenes before? Are they our memories of the harrowing news of children in [detention centres](#) in the United States? Do they remind us of American President Donald Trump's threat-promise to build a wall along the border with Mexico? An algorithm slides down the screen, slowly morphing into barbed wire. What was an inkling in the minds of the viewers is confirmed...

As the sequences progress, the bird-dancers portray intimacy, separation, despair, love, loss and isolation. Peace and stability seem transient, as fleeting as such feelings are in the life of a migrant.

A word on the music: In a significant moment, the semblance of a melodic line turns into a robust industrial beat. The birds, shedding their unique characteristics, are suddenly forced to follow the rhythm of this beat. At the same time, giant cogs turn in the wheel depicted against the backdrop. The sharp critique of capitalism and its [relationship with migration](#) and labour in this sequence will not be missed.

With ease and grace, Jehlen conveys a range of difficult themes related to migration; from the law to suicide, labour and love through her bird-dancers. 'Conference of Birds' is an intense experience that offers not a moment of relief. There are virtually no cathartic spectacles to divert a viewer from the pathos of a migrant's life. This was a courageous choreography.

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ARTS & CULTURE

Anikaya Dance Theatre takes flight at Mahaney



The Anikaya Dance Theatre performed at Middlebury on March 11 and 12. Photo by [Courtesy Photo](#) | The Middlebury Campus

By [Sophia Afsar-Keshmiri](#)

March 17, 2022 | 5:58am EDT

Despite setbacks presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Anikaya Dance Theatre was able to make the journey to Middlebury at long last to perform their interpretive dance piece “Conference of the Birds.” The group performed at the college’s Dance

Theater on March 11 and 12. The group's visit had to be rescheduled twice since planning began in 2019. The performance was well worth the wait.

The group is made up of extremely talented dancers, composers and artists from all over the world. The group hails from no one place, and has projects in the works in five different countries. The show included elements of dance, theatre, music and graphic design. The group prides itself on its multidimensionality and use of many art forms. Founded in 1998, their mission is to bring people from different cultures and backgrounds together. Persian poet Farid Ud din Attar wrote an epic also titled "Conference of the Birds," serving as the inspiration for this modern rendition. The Anikaya Dance Theatre places a large emphasis on the importance of empathy in making the world a better place.

The dancers played a group of birds, soaring through valleys, desperately trying to find a mythical creature named Simurgh. The performance was organized into ten different segments, divided by the different valleys visited along the journey. The story concludes with the birds realizing that they were the Simurgh the entire time. The group took the audience through all ten segments, using changes in lighting, music and choreography to tell the story.

For 100 minutes, the group guided the audience through each chapter by moving as one in their transitions from valley to valley; they danced as if they were a flock of birds, gathering together and making wide flying motions with their arms in unison. Time in each valley was signified by more individualistic dancing. Some dancers would be performing solos, some duets and at times trios — all simultaneously. At these times, the dancers portrayed a more chaotic scene of nature, rather than the symmetric organization associated with a flock of birds flying together.

There were platforms of varying heights on the stage that the dancers moved on and off of throughout the performance. At different times, these platforms gave the illusion of birds perched on branches of different trees or flying at different heights. At one point in the choreography, one member let themselves fall from one of the high platforms and the group gingerly caught them. The choreography was filled with other unique acrobatics. Members carried each other, climbed over each other and formed barricades with their bodies that other members would try to break through.

Behind the dancers, three screens displayed moving digital art. At times, a birdlike figure was projected on the screen and the dancers would respond to this figure's movements and the music. At other times, the art and movements being shown on the screens complemented the dancers' choreography.

There was no need for faux feathers or beaks to convince viewers that the dancers were a flock of birds; they instead wore outfits consisting of layers of loose, thin garments. Some dancers had multiple shirts on, others had clothing tied around their waists and others still wore scarves draped and wrapped around them. The clothing hung limp on their bodies, flowing as they ran and leaped across the stage. At one point in the performance, all the dancers began to shed the many layers they wore to signify pain.

Most notable about the performance was the group's sheer athleticism. The choreography was so impossibly athletic, and even more gracefully executed. There were times when members would shake convulsively and collapse to the ground, then pull themselves back up and perform the stunt again. There were long moments when the group would run laps around the stage, swinging their arms and crouching low to the ground to keep in character.

The group did not take a break during the entire performance. If the dancers were tired by the strenuous choreography, they certainly did not show it; the group only grew more energetic as the performance progressed. While there is room for error during the final moments of grueling game or athletic activity, there was none for Anikaya; the group couldn't afford mishaps during stunts such as catching a falling cast member or turning their bodies into a platform for other members to climb. Their mental and physical fortitude was mind-blowing. Throughout the entire piece their movements only grew more graceful, intentional and certain. At the point when most would have been out of breath, exhausted and ready to collapse, their acting only grew more convincing, their choreography more athletic and their energy to unimaginable heights.

The most memorable and emotional scene from the performance was "The Valley of Bewilderment." The dancers' facial expressions and movements implied a haunting pain that resonated with the audience. They screeched in pain, hobbled across the stage, and helped each other up. It was both a moment of fear and unity in the performance.

Migration and journey were the two main themes of the performance. When Anikaya was introduced, it was emphasized how timely these themes were, given the horrible suffering and pain that the people of Ukraine are currently experiencing. In the back of programs, audience members were provided a sticky note, asked to "consider the Valley of Detachment," and prompted to write the single item they would bring to face the burden of leaving their whole world. What would you bring?

منطق الطير لفرقة أنيكايا في "رام الله للرقص المعاصر"

© 2023-06-27 12:00:00



من عرض فرقة أنيكايا في رام الله

"مؤتمر الطيور"

"مؤتمر الطيور مستوحى من قصيدة القرن الثاني عشر للشاعر الفارسي فريد الدين العطار. في قصيدة عطار، انطلقت طيور العالم بحثاً عن الطائر الأسطوري. تتخلى العديد من الطيور عن أعشاشها، وعندما تصل إلى أرض التنين الأخضر، تجد فقط مرآة تنعكس فيها، وتصبح هي نفسها التنين الأخضر. تصبح القصيدة إطاراً للروايات التي تم جمعها من المهاجرين المعاصرين، وترمز إلى الرحلة التي نخوضها معاً."

يمكن القول إن تكون هذه الملحمة التي ألّفها الشاعر الفارسي فريد الدين العطار النيسابوري، محلّ تجسيدٍ للراقصين في قصر رام الله الثقافي. ويمكن كذلك القول إنّ هذه الملحمة قد تخطّت حدود الجغرافيا لتصل إلى "فرقة أنيكايا" متعددة الجنسيات، وقبل ذلك إلى المسرح الفرنسي "جون كلود كاريار"، وببتر بروك المخرج البريطاني الشهير، ونوفل عزارة المخرج التونسي في عرضه "منطق الطير".

يقول أحد المستشرقين الألمان إنّ العطار استخدم تأويلاً شعرياً خيالياً، لتتوافق خصائصه مع لغة الكائنات التي لا تمتلك لغة الإنسان، كذلك الأمر لدى فرقة أنيكايا، التي استخدمت الرقص المعاصر لتنقل ما أسمته بـ "مؤتمر الطيور". ذلك أنّه -أي الرقص- يلامس الجانب الغريزيّ من الكائن الحيّ، ويخلق فناً بعيداً كلّ البعد عن مدينة الكلمات إذا ما استعرنا العبارة من الكاتب الأرجنتينيّ ألبرتو مانغويل. نحن في هذا العرض لفرقة "أنيكايا" إزاء نسج "لمؤتمر" با لجسد والذاكرة معاً، وهذا هو جوهر عنوان مهرجان رام الله لهذا العام للرقص المعاصر.. "فللجسد ألف قصة وقصة".



نور حطيط
كاتبة من لبنان

منطق الطير لفرقة أنيكايا في "رام الله للرقص المعاصر"

آني إرنو وأطفال للاء

"فرجة" وحقيبة الأحلام

بيلا حديد... في الهوية والأزياء
والسينما

مع "مؤتمر الطيور"، تتخلى مشاهد فيزيقية ذات بعد تأويلي، تصحبنا في رحلات ذاكرة عبر مراكب البحار والسواحل على السواء، لتضعنا في مواجهة حتمية مع الشتات أو الموت، ولما كانت الطيور الأدمية ترقص رقصتها على المسرح، كانت الأجساد تمتلك تحت الأضواء وعاءها الخاص والفريد، لنسج حكايات العبور والتيه الذي يُذيب ويُشوّث، لكنه يعجز - في الوقت عينه - عن اختزال المعاناة والألم.

عُرفت الهجرة القسرية لقبائل "الشبروكي" CHEROKEE التي كانت قد انطلقت من جورجيا إلى أوكلاهوما في عام 1838، باسم "قافلة الدموع". وأشير إلى الهجرات القسرية التي لاحقها الجوع والوحشية إبان الهولوكوست باسم "مسيرات الموت"، ويطلق الألمان في الوقت الحاضر على محطة قطار فريدريك شتراسه في برلين اسم "قصر الدموع"، حيث يلتقي الشرق بالغرب. ورافقت هذه الرحلات القسرية حكايات عاطفية وجدانية لا يمكن الانفلات من رمزياتها.

وإذا ما استعنا بالإنثروبولوجيا التأويلية، يمكننا فهم الأجزاء الصغيرة من حياة "الهجرة" التي قامت فرقة أنيكايا بتجسيدها على المسرح، خاصة وأن "أنيكايا" استعانت بقصة الشاعر الصوفي فريد الدين العطار للكشف عن تعقيدات تجارب الهجرات القسرية التي يعتريها البعض بأنها مشكلة العصر.

تدور قصة الشاعر الفارسي حول موضوع "الانتقال والحركة"، فرحلة "منطق الطير" هي رحلة جماعية، تنتقل فيها الطيور للوصول إلى آلهتها المنشودة "السيمرغ". وتواجه الطيور صعوبات شتى وعقبات أثناء رحلتها. كذلك الأمر، في ملحمة "طيور فرقة أنيكايا" التي تنتقل من مكانها إلى اللامكان، من البيت إلى البيت. هذا المشهد، يعود بنا، إلى باشلار الذي أطلق على بودلير صفة "الحالم بالستائر" لاعتقاده أن خلف الستائر الدائنة يبدو الثلج أكثر بياضاً، أكثر صقيفاً، ورعباً. إذ وظيفة الانتقال والحركة لدى طيور فرقة أنيكايا، تؤسس لسردية تقوم على للخيال السياسي، كونها تجسد هجر الجغرافيا القديمة الدافئة والأمنة بحثاً عن العودة أو الذات؛ ليصبح الآخر- أي الطيور- ضدّاً، كما هو الحال مع السكان الأصليين الفلسطينيين، فإذا بلسان العالم يقول: "أنا أعرف، غير أنني لا أريد أن أعرف بأنني أعرف، فلا أعرف إذاً." وهذه العبارة أوردها الفيلسوف سلافوي جيكا في كتابه المعروف "العنف: تأملات في وجوه السنة"، ليصف التزييف وإخفاء الواقع.



من عرض فرقة أنيكايا في رام الله

التيه مجسداً برقصه

مع "مؤتمر الطيور"، تتخلى مشاهد فيزيقية ذات بعد تأويلي، تصحبنا في رحلات ذاكرة عبر مراكب البحار واليابسة على السواء، لتضعنا في مواجهة حتمية مع الشتات أو الموت، ولما كانت الطيور الأدمية ترقص رقصتها على المسرح، كانت الأجساد تمتلك تحت الأضواء وعاءها الخاص والفريد، لنسج حكايات العبور والتيه الذي يُذيب ويُشوّث، لكنه يعجز - في الوقت عينه - عن اختزال المعاناة والألم. وإذا ما عدنا إلى "الترانسفير" الفلسطيني، فالجسد عايش فجيعته الخاصة، ودماؤه العنف الكولونيالي للوجه نحوه، بعدما نقش الإسرائيلي على جسد الفلسطيني نقشته الاستعمارية؛ بغرض محوه وسلب هويته، لنكون إزاء تجربة جديدة مع الألم. وبالعودة - أيضاً - إلى الهجرات القسرية التي نتجت عن حروب منطقتنا العربية، وسلسلة النزاعات التي لا تنتهي، فالذات متشظية والجسد مدّى بفعل نشاط استعماري دائم، والتيه يتخلى من تداخل هذين الفعلين معاً.

يقول الباحث الأنثروبولوجي "دايفد لو بروتون": إن الاختبار التي تمر به القبائل الهندوأمريكية يعبر عن رابطة اجتماعية قوية، إذ يسعى إلى خلق عشيرة قدرية من خلال التذكير، عبر زمن الحكايات بالآلام والعواطف المشتركة. ويشير لو بروتون هنا إلى قيام بعض أفراد القبائل الهندوأمريكية، بطقس يظهر وكأنه فعل غريب، وهو النظر صوب الشمس في أثناء تعلق أفراد القبيلة بأغصان الأشجار، عبر حبال يربطوها بإتقان حول صدورهم، فلا تُفك الحبال سوى مع هبوط الليل إقماً بمساعدة الأصدقاء، أو بالوسائل الذاتية. وإذا بحثنا في معنى الألم هنا، نراه يخلق لأفراد العشيرة بُعداً حاداً للذاكرة. كذلك في العرض الراقص على خشبات رام الله، استطاعت الطيور الأدمية صياغة هذه الروابط مسحوبة بالأمها وعذاباتنا، عبر إيماءاتها الخاصة وحركة أجسادها الهائمة في رحلة والتيه والعبور إلى أرض الخوف من الآخر "للضاد لها".

ويعود الفيلسوف الفرنسيّ جاك دريدا ليذكّرنا، في محاضرته "عن الضيافة" التي عُقدت في عام 1996، إلى حوار أفلاطون في "السفسطائي"، الذي يسرد فيه لقاءً جمع سقراط بزائرٍ من مدينة إلّيا الواقعة في جنوب إيطاليا. إذ عبّر سقراط -وقتها- عن غبطة أصابته، فرحًا باستقبال هذا الغريب ورغبة في سماعه والإنصات لثقافته. ويقول لنا دريدا إنّ معنى الغريب في اليونانية كانت "زينو"، ومنها أُشتقت كلمة "زينوفوبيا" و صارت تستعمل في الوقت الحاضر للدلالة على الخوف من الآخر، المهاجر، اللاجئ والعاث.

موسم العودة إلى الذات

في حكاية "منطق الطير" للصوفيّ الفارسيّ فريد الدين العطار، تطرق الطيور الباب فور وصولها إلى "قاف"، الجبل الأسطوريّ لملاقاة آلهتها، وحين يُفتح أمامها الباب للمصود بعد إصرارٍ منها، تنهار من هول المشهد، فلا تعثر على "السيمورغ" بل على نفسها، في المرآة. وكذلك الأمر في المشهد الأخير من "مؤتمر الطيور"، فالطيور التي واصلت سيرها، لم تجد تنينها الأخضر، بل ذاتها أصبحت هي نفسها التنين الأخضر. لماذا "التنين" في رقصة مؤتمر الطيور؟ ربما لأنّ التنين في الأساطير الشرقية القديمة كان رمزًا للقوة التي لا حدود لها.

ونظمت سرية رام الله الأولى، في الفترة الواقعة ما بين 15 و22 حزيران، الدورة السابعة عشرة لمهرجان رام الله للرقص للعاصر، ويأتي هذا التنظيم بالتزامن مع إحياء الذكرى الخامسة والسبعين للنكبة الفلسطينية، حيث شاركت حوالي 15 فرقة وفنانا من بينهم خمس فرق أجنبية تبنت إحداها رقصة مؤتمر الطيور. وافتتح للمهرجان مع "حلم لوسيد" لفرقة "مازيل فريتن" الفرنسية، واختتم بنجاح مع فرقة E الأمريكية وفرقة سرية رام الله الأولى الفلسطينية بعمل مشترك تحت عنوان: أرى/لا أرى. ويأتي هذا المهرجان الذي استضاف نخبة من مصممي الرقص المعاصر، والفرق الدولية والعربية والفلسطينية، ليؤكد أهمية الفنّ الذي يخلق "فضاءً تشاركيا عمومياً"، وكما يقول أنطونيو نيغري، الفيلسوف المعروف: الفنّ لا يبلغ مقام الجمال، إلّا إذا كان قادرًا على اختراع المشترك.



من عرض فرقة أنيكايا في رام الله



منطق الطير لفرقة أنيكايا في "رام الله للرقص المعاصر"

© 2023-06-27 12:00:00

by Noor Hoteit

"The Conference of Birds is inspired by a 12th-century poem by the Persian poet Farid al-Din al-Attar. In Attar's poem, the birds of the world set out in search of the legendary bird. Many birds abandon their nests, and when they reach the land of the green dragon, they only find a mirror in which they are reflected, and become themselves The Green Dragon. The poem becomes the framework for the accounts gathered from contemporary immigrants, symbolizing the journey we take together."

It can be said that this epic, written by the Persian poet Farid al-Din al-Attar al-Nisaburi, is the embodiment of dancers in the Ramallah Cultural Palace. It can also be said that this epic has crossed the boundaries of geography to reach the multinational "Anikaya Troupe", and before that to the French playwright "Jean-Claude Carrier", the famous British director Peter Brook, and the Tunisian director Nawfal Azara in his show "The Logic of the Bird".

A German orientalist says that Al-Attar used an imaginary poetic interpretation, so that its characteristics correspond to the language of beings that do not possess human language. The same applies to the Anikaya troupe, which used contemporary dance to convey what it called the "Bird Conference". This is because it - that is, dance - touches the instinctive side of a living being, and creates art that is far from the city of words, if we borrow the phrase from the Argentine writer Alberto Manguel. We are in this show by "Anikaya" about weaving a "conference" with the body and memory together, and this is the essence of the title of this year's Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival.. "The body has a thousand stories and stories."

Caravan of tears

The forced migration of the Cherokee tribes from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838 is known as the "Caravan of Tears." Forced migrations followed by starvation and brutality during the Holocaust were referred to as "death marches", and today's Germans call Berlin's Friedrichstrasse train station the "Palace of Tears", where East meets West. These forced journeys were accompanied by emotional and emotional stories whose symbolism cannot escape.

With interpretive anthropology as a lens, we can understand the small parts of the life of "migration" that the Anikaya troupe embodied on the stage, especially since "Anikaya" used the story of the Sufi poet Farid al-Din al-Attar to reveal the complexities of the experiences of forced migration, which some consider to be the problem of the age.

The story of the Persian poet revolves around the theme of "transition and movement." The journey of "Logic of the Birds" is a group journey in which the birds travel to reach their desired gods, the Simargh. Birds face various difficulties and obstacles during their journey. Likewise, in the epic "Birds of Anikaya Band", which moves from place to place, from home to Labit. This scene takes us back to Bachelard, who called Baudelaire a "dreamer of curtains" because he believed that behind dark curtains the snow appears whiter, more frosty, and more terrifying. As the function of movement and movement in the birds of the Anikaia squad establishes a narrative based on the political imagination, as it embodies the abandonment of the old, warm and safe geography in search of return or self. So the other - i.e. the birds - becomes an antithesis, as is the case with the indigenous Palestinians, so that the tongue of the world says: "I know, but I do not want to know that I know, so I do not know."

Lost is embodied in a dance

With the "Conference of Birds", creating physical scenes with an interpretive dimension, accompanying us on trips of memory across boats of seas and land alike, to put us in an inevitable confrontation with dispersion or death, and when human birds danced their dance on the stage, the bodies possessed under the lights Its special and unique vessel, to weave stories of transit and wandering that dissolves and disperses, but is unable - at the same time - to reduce suffering and pain. And if we return to the Palestinian "transfer", the body is living its own agony, and its blood is the colonial violence directed at it, after the Israeli inscribed on the Palestinian's body his colonial inscription; With the aim of erasing it and robbing it of its identity, we will be facing a new experience with pain. Returning - also - to the forced migrations that resulted from the wars of our Arab region, and the endless series of conflicts.

The anthropologist researcher David Le Bruton says, "The test that the Indo-American tribes go through expresses a strong social bond, as it seeks to create a fatalistic clan by reminding, through the time of stories, of common pains and emotions." Le Bruton points out here that some members of the Indo-American tribes With a ritual that appears as a strange act, which is looking towards the sun while the members of the tribe are attached to the branches of trees, through ropes that they tie neatly around their chests, and the ropes are not loosened except at nightfall, either with the help of friends, or by self-meanings. The members of the clan have a sharp dimension to memory. As well, in the dance show on the stage of Ramallah, the human

birds were able to form these bonds drawn from their pain and suffering, through their special gestures and the movement of their wandering bodies in the journey of wandering and crossing into the land of fear of the "opposite" other.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in his lecture "On Hospitality" in 1996, reminds us of Plato's dialogue in "The Sophist", in which he recounts a meeting between Socrates and a visitor from the city of Elea in southern Italy. Socrates - at the time - expressed his happiness, joy in receiving this stranger and a desire to hear him and listen to his culture. Derrida tells us that the meaning of the stranger in Greek was "Zeno", from which the word "xenophobia" was derived and is now used to denote fear of the other, the immigrant, the refugee and the transitor.

The season of returning to oneself

In the story of "The Logic of Birds" by the Persian mystic Farid al-Din al-Attar, the birds knock on the door as soon as they reach "Qaf", the legendary mountain to meet their gods, and when the locked door is opened in front of them after her insistence, they collapse from the horror of the scene, and find not the "simurgh" but themselves, in the mirror. Likewise, in the last scene of the "Conference of Birds", the birds that continued walking did not find their simurgh, but themselves became the same simurgh. Why the "simurgh" in the Conference of the Birds dance performance? Perhaps because in ancient Eastern mythology, the simurgh was a symbol of limitless power.

The First Ramallah Company organized, between June 15 and 22, the seventeenth session of the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival. Bird conference. The festival opened with "Lucid Dream" by the French band "Mazel Friten", and concluded with success with the American band E and the Palestinian Ramallah First Band, with a joint work under the title: I See/I Don't See. This festival, which hosted an elite group of contemporary choreographers, and international, Arab and Palestinian troupes, comes to confirm the importance of art that creates a "public participatory space", and as Antonio Negri, the well-known philosopher, says: Art does not reach the status of beauty, unless it is capable of inventing the common.



بحث



منصة فلسطين الثقافية



سرر شاشات سبج تشاكيل نغم تراث كتب ترجمات مختارات
درست درك تشق

"مؤتمر الطيور".. رقص أممي مُعاصر يتكئ على نص صوفي عتيق!

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شارك المقال



يوسف الشايب:

بوحى من نص "منطق الطير" لفريد الدين العطار النيسابوري، قُتِمت فرقة "أنيكايا" متعددة الجنسيات، عرضاً راقصاً ملحمياً، احتضنه مسرح قصر رام الله الثقافي، مساء أول من أمس، ضمن فعاليات مهرجان رام الله للرقص المعاصر، حمل عنوان "مؤتمر الطيور".

ومن حكاية النص الصوفي القائمة على رحلة مجموعة من الطيور بحثاً عن الطائر الأسطوري، التنين الأخضر، في أرض "السيمورغ"، ذهبت ويندي جيهاين، مخرجة العرض ومصمته وإحدى راقصيه، إلى معالجة قضية اللجوء المعاصر، الذي بات ظاهرة تجاوزت كل الجغرافيات، وهو ما كان في تركيبة العرض المبهرة أداءً، وسينوغرافياً، وموسيقى، وإضاءة، وتكوينات بالفيديو فحسب، بل في تعدد جنسيات الراقصات والراقصين، ما بين الولايات المتحدة الأميركية، وبنين، وفلسطين، وإندونيسيا، وجنوب أفريقيا، والهند، وتركيا، والبرازيل، وتايوان، لتقدم جدليات الاختلاف والتضامن والتشابه بلغة حركية فريدة قدمها مبدعون من المهجرين الجدد عن ديارهم.



والسرابية التي ميّزت العرض، رغم وضوح تأويلات عناصره المختلفة، كانت عنصراً محورياً للتعبير عن حالة التيه، في البحث عن المبتغى، سواء في النص العتيق، أو الحكايات الجديدة، فلا شيء يبعث على الدهشة أكثر من اللاوضوح، وهو ما جعل العمل في دائرة اختيار الجمهور، الذي قضى برفقة الطيور الأدبيين قرابة ثمانين دقيقة، في رحلة يمكن وصفها بمتغيرة الشكل، نحو المسعى الغامض، المتأرجح ما بين حلم، وأمل، وأسطورة، وميتافيزيق.



كان "مؤتمر الطيور" رحلة سردية ذات أسلوب ساحر، ليس بعيداً عن تلك الروح الصوفية الأسيرة، ولكن بالانكفاء على أداء غير تقليدي، فكان عرضاً مُبهجاً تمت حكايته بستارة عملت بإتقان وعلى مهل، لتخرج من الحكايات الجمعية، بثوب ملوّن، حديث ومعتق في آن، ويرمي بالتصوف في أحضان الرقمنة، بدراسة واعية على كافة المستويات.

ويغوص العمل في لوحاته المتعددة بالروحانيات عميقاً، دون الابتعاد عن الأسئلة الوجودية المتواصلة ما بقي الإنسان وعقله، وبالاتكاء على فكرة البحث عن جنة ما، والطريق الوعرة نحوها، ما بين صحارى ووديان، ومخاطر عدّة، علاوة على إغراءات النفس البشرية، لعلهم يصلون إلى كائن ما، أو ملجأ ما يشعّ شمساً تظلل الأرض بأجنحة الطيور، في خيال كان له سطوته وحضوره غير المقحم في "مؤتمر الطيور"، الذي تتقلب في إطاره أدوار الطيور، فيصبح العبيد ملوكاً، واللصوص أتقياء، وهكذا، ولكن دون التنازل عن الذاكرات التي لا تزال طازجة.



وكان للحبّ حضوره الرمزي، سواء بلغة أدائية صوفيّة أو مُعاصرة، باعتباره فعلاً مضاداً للتسلط، وللعنصرية بطبيعة الحال، كما للاستقامة المزيفة، لغة جسدية لم تخل من تشنجات وقفزات مذهلة بدت كأنها جزء من سلاسل متتالية لطيرانات رشيقة على الأرض، وفي السماء المفترضة.

يعكس العرض الذي كان فيه بعض الاستطالات، ليس فقط أزمة الطيور كتعبير عن مآسي اللاجئين، بل تلك العلاقة ما بين المجتمع الواحد، من صراعات موسمية، وامتزاج قد يطول أو يقصر، ليشكل فرصة للخيال والسحر، علاوة على ما يقدمه "مؤتمر الطيور" في ما وراء اللوحات الأدائية الراقصة من أفكار عميقة ترقى لوصف رؤى أو فكر فلسفي.



تبقى الإشارة إلى أن المجموعة عمدت إلى التخلص من التقاليد الفنية الصارمة نحو عالمية الأداء في عرض رقص معاصر، فشكّل حجر زاوية في هذا الجانب، باتجاه الاتكاء على ما هو ماضوي وثري ثقافياً، ومعاصر موضوعاً وشكلاً، للخروج بما يعمر طويلاً لدى مشاهديه.



"مؤتمر الطيور".. رقص أممي مُعاصر يتكى على نص صوفي عتيق!

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Inspired by the text “ Mantiq ut Tayr” by Farid Al-Din Attar, the multinational ANIKAYA Dance theater presented Conference of the Birds, an epic dance performance, hosted by Ramallah Cultural Palace, the day before yesterday, as part of Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival.

From the story of this mystical text which tells the story of a group of birds in search of the legendary bird, the Simurgh, Wendy Jehlen, the piece’s director, choreographer, and one of its dancers, addresses issues of contemporary refugees, a phenomenon that has transcended all geography. The story was told not only in the dazzling combination of performance, scenography, music, lighting and video projections, but also in the plurality of nationalities of the dancers from the US, Benin, Palestine, Indonesia, South Africa, India, Turkey, Brazil and Taiwan. Through all of this she presented the dialectics of difference and solidarity. All of this was intertwined in a unique dynamic language presented by the artists.

The mirage that characterized the performance, with the clarity of its various elements, was a pivotal element in expressing the state of wandering, the search for the desired, whether in the ancient text or in the new stories with which the piece was infused. Despite its precision, there was enough ambiguity to allow space for the audience to find its own stories, while they accompanied these human birds on an eighty minute journey that can be described as shapeshifting, mysterious and oscillating between dream, hope, myth and metaphysics.

Conference of the Birds was a narrative journey with a style that captivated the mystical spirit of the original text, but that was unconventional in form. It was a conscious study at all levels and embraced Sufism with multimedia arms.

The work dives deeply into its multiple images with spirituality. It asked existential questions of the human mind through a metaphor of the search for paradise, and the rugged road that leads toward it, through deserts and valleys, many dangers, and the many temptations of the human soul on its way to enlightenment.

The roles of the birds fluctuate, so that slaves become kings, thieves are pious, leaving memories that remain fresh.

Love was constantly present, whether in a mystical or contemporary performance language, as an anti-authoritarian act, an act against racism as well as false integrity. The body language they used was not devoid of convulsions and amazing jumps that seemed as if they were part of graceful flight.

The performance treats not only the crisis of the birds as an expression of the tragedies of refugees, but also relationships within communities, conflicts, encounters, as opportunities for imagination and magic. In addition to the text, the images created in the dance are a philosophy in themselves.

The company sought to rid themselves of strict artistic traditions to move toward a universal performance form. By standing on the foundations of the past and cultural richness and telling this contemporary story in a contemporary form, the company made a lasting impact on the audience.



India's Premier Magazine for the Performing Arts

Reviews

Conference of the Birds

Posted by **Sruti** • Wednesday, April 9, 2025

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On 9 March 2025, Boston residents and visitors were treated to a thought provoking 70-minute, nuanced and delicately crafted interpretation of Farid ud-Di Attar's Persian poem, *The Conference of the Birds*, at the Arrow Arts Theatre in Boston by Anikaya Dance Theatre

The diverse species of birds, led by Hoopoe, imaginatively projected using motion capture as a golden-hued bird, embark on a quest to find their true king, the Simorgh, who represents the divine. Their journey involves traversing seven valleys, each representing a distinct aspect of the human experience: quest, love, insight, detachment, unity, wonderment, and the valley of poverty and annihilation. While many abandon the perilous path, those who reach the land of Simorgh realise that the Simorgh resides within themselves.

Within the allegorical framework of this poem, Wendy Jehlen, a Bharatanātyam trained dancer and choreographer, ingeniously interweaves the narrative of our time. As the birds seek belonging in their new environment, echoes of struggles associated with migration resonate. As they progress from the valley of quest to the valley of love, the Hoopoe transforms into an Alif, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, which symbolises oneness and the body of the beloved. The motion capture movements of the Hoopoe mirror the choreography of the dancers, creating a visually striking and symbolic representation.



GOLDEN LION PHOTOGRAPHY



Unconventional in its narrative structure and form, *Conference of the Birds* is most appreciated when one has already read the poem. If not, one is treated to the palpable energy and shared kinship the dancers convey throughout the performance. Like the droplets of water that form a vast ocean, Anikaya's superb ensemble cast of dancers, Wendy Jehlen, K. Sarveshan, Ching-I Chang, Ibrahim Abdo, Marcel Gbeffa, Yasin Anar, Danny Pamungkas, and Yousef Sbeih, each trained in different movement practices from Bharatanatyam, Javanese, to Capoeira, brought fluidity, muscularity and cohesiveness to the imagery. They embodied the universal quest for seeking the divine that transcends all man-made distinctions of caste, creed, race, and religion.

In the valley of detachment, a poignant moment occurs when the dancers leave behind fragments of their clothing, which they subsequently retrieve to demonstrate their unity and integration into a cohesive whole. In the subsequent journey to the valley of Unity, the movement is inspired by dhikr/zikr practices primarily from Indonesia and an island off the coast of East Africa. This leads to a combination of fear, wonder, and disorientation caused by the realisation of the enormity of the reality of unity. Towards the end, they all perform movements of a large bird, the Simorgh, symbolising the universal message of all cultures and religions: that the divine resides within us, and we, in turn, reside within the divine.

Throughout the narrative, Wendy's profound comprehension of Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, Persian language, coupled with her experience in collaborating with Deaf-Blind individuals to directly access dance, and drawing upon the insights and responses garnered from workshop

The play is directed by choreographer Wendy Jehlen in collaboration with an ensemble of dancer/choreographers from Benin, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, India/South Africa, Palestine, Taiwan and Turkey, with original music and projections created by an international team from France, Iran and the US.

During our conversation, Wendy expressed her deep connection to this production and its ensemble cast. She emphasised the significance of every story and the importance of comprehending the broader context in which they unfold. *The Conference of the Birds* stands as a timeless tale that serves as a profound reflection of our own selves.

by

Anita Vallabh



Conference of the Birds Residency Activities

Migrations:

In conjunction with performances, the Birds offer a workshop that introduces participants to some of the listening practices in Conference of the Birds. The exercises in the workshop guide participants into a space of shared spontaneous decision-making, into a visceral understanding of community. The workshop often culminates in a performance of Migrations, a companion piece to Conference of the Birds intended to be created on site.

Migrations is a site-responsive, structured movement score that incorporates elements based on the flocking behavior of birds, exploring similarities between movements found in human cultures and migration. The work is created in workshops and can be performed by 20-30 community members. Migrations is a celebration of our coming together, confluences, our crossings of borders and boundaries. It is a celebration of our ability to fly again.

Migrations has been created and performed in Boston and Cambridge, MA; Providence, RI; New York City; Washington, DC; Beijing, China; Maputo, Mozambique; Ramallah, Palestine; and Kigali, Rwanda.





Story Gathering

Story Gathering workshops are like those conducted during the creation of the performance. These workshops share practices used in the creation of the stage work to create a space where participants share stories of their own journeys, their own migrations and border crossings through words, visual art and movement. In planning these workshops we work with organizations that serve local immigrant and refugee communities, as we did during the creation of Conference of the Birds.

Moving Beyond the Superficial When Understanding Difference

This workshop is primarily discussion-based, with a few exercises to elicit deeper interrogation about our ideas about difference. It begins with the lived experience of the creative ensemble - the dancers, the director, the projection team, the music composition team and the set design team - as an illustration of how categories fall apart when questioned, and how understanding and creativity can grow out of deeper understanding of difference without resorting to hegemonic preconceptions.

The Body in Diaspora x 3

Body in Diaspora takes the landscape of African diaspora as a symbolic and critical tool and incorporates elements and foundations from the different languages of Afro Brazilian dances (mostly urban social dances, such as Samba Rock, as well as ancestral dances and capoeira) and some languages from West Africa (Mostly Senegal and Guinea).

This version of the workshop takes the Body in Diaspora practice of Luciane and invites dancers of two other diasporas into the dialogue - Sarveshan Gangen, a South African of Indian descent, and Ching-I Chang, a Taiwan-born dancer who emigrated to the United States as an adult and has lived in the US for many years.

The Body as Home

Understanding natural movement, learned movement, and developing an awareness of the ways in which we are made of the contexts in which we have grown. This workshop is co-led by Marcel Gbeffa and Wendy Jehlen. Marcel grew up between Congo and Benin. Wendy Jehlen grew up bi-ethnic in the US and studied classical Indian dance since childhood. The workshop begins with foundational dances from both of their practices and looks at how these dance styles and others form the foundation of their native movement languages.

Storytelling through Projection Art, taught by David Bengali

Immersive Sound Design, taught by Eric Raynaud (Fraction) www.fractionisnoise.art