

“Siguifin” – The magical Beeing

In Conversation with Amala Dianor, Ladji Koné, Naomi Fall
and Alioune Diagne

Text: Belinda Mathieu

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In 2020, contemporary French choreographer and former hip-hop artist Amala Dianor started out on the wild project of creating a dance piece in collaboration with three different choreographers from West Africa: Naomi Fall, director of the dance festival Fari Foni Waati in Bamako, Mali; Ladji Koné, who works in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and Alioune Diagne, who runs the Le Château cultural centre in Senegal. In 2021, “Siguifin” was finally complete, an impetuous and touching piece that puts nine young African dancers on stage to demonstrate the range of talent in Africa. A group interview with the four choreographers who worked on the project.

Belinda Mathieu: How did the “Siguifin” project originate?

Amala Dianor: It all began in 2015, with the “Clin d’œil du temps” [The Blink of Time] project, which I staged in the Loire in order to encourage young emerging dancers by offering them a production and tour. For a few years I had in mind the idea of returning to Africa with my associate Ladji Koné, who performed in my “Quelque part au milieu de l’infini” [Somewhere in the Middle of the Infinite], to share my experience. So we decided to adapt that project for West Africa, more precisely in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali. Our idea was to bring international attention to choreographers working in those countries who are working to professionalize and develop contemporary dance in Africa. I think Naomi Fall, Ladji Koné and Alioune Diagne perfectly represent this generation.

BM: How did the creative process unfold?

Amala Dianor: We began in March 2020, but the project was interrupted by Covid and wasn’t able to get going again until summer 2021. The final version was unveiled in January 2022. Each choreographer worked with our artistic team for three weeks and was free to develop what they wanted. Alioune Diagne concentrated on the relation between Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali, three neighbouring countries that are linked by migration, but whose customs and ways of life are very different. Naomi Fall considered the issue of subsidised projects, tainted by clichéd slogans of goodwill, that Europeans are trying to set up in those countries and are quickly being confronted with a very different reality. Ladji Koné explored traditional forms of dance and forgotten customs, which form part of the heritage of the dancers even if they are not conscious of it. Finally, my role was to come and observe the work, to understand the essence of what these choreographers were trying to do with the dancers. At the end of the process, I wove the elements together into a coherent, one-hour whole.

BM: Given these particularities, what were the main challenges you faced in terms of the writing of this piece?

Alioune Diagne: It was challenging to find a common ground between the dancers who are from different countries, have different backgrounds, cultures, religions, belong to different movements, and who have different everyday lives. They also don’t have the same training, some are from traditional dance, some from contemporary dance or different kinds of hip-hop. I was the first to work with the group. They had a deep desire to dance and to show what they were capable of, so I oriented the work process around taking our time, to get them to feel rather than show.

Ladji Koné: Even if we know each other well, we had never worked together as choreographers with Amala. It was new and ambitious. Developing the project in situ was influenced by our desires and

our dreams, but above all by the fact that international meetings require costly logistics. They were the parameters that defined our sequential writing process and that allowed us to share our worlds step by step, before the production was finally constructed so as to become a ‘magical being’.

Naomi Fall: The biggest challenge was working out how to harmonize the qualities of each of the four choreographers. I was the last one to contribute before Amala. So I had seen what the two previous choreographers had done and I wanted to do something theatrical and less aesthetic. The difficulty was then how to connect a work of a completely different kind to those of the two other choreographers.

I asked to help me translate the idea of the monster, magic, something powerful, transformation...

BM: One of the production’s goals is to put young African dancers in the spotlight. How did you choose the performers?

Ladji Koné: I selected from among the best Burkinabè b-boys and b-girls that I know, and for whom this project would be a springboard for their careers.

Naomi Fall: Salif Coulibaly, Adama Mariko and Adiaara Traoré are three dancers with whom I have collaborated with a lot in the past. I enjoy working with them and I wanted to share this project with them. I think it’s beautiful to be able to take things further together after so many years, and to have a chance to work at this level. It was an intense and unique experience.

Amala Dianor: This piece is wholly dedicated to the dancers, its aim is to help them understand what it means to be a professional dancer, to work with choreographers who have different conceptions of choreography. It is a chance to ignite their ambition, for them to meet one another, and to encourage them to join forces, and to develop projects among



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themselves and develop ties between the different countries.

BM: What does the title "Siguifin" evoke for each of you?

Naomi Fall: An afternoon spent drinking tea in Bamako... We discussed the exquisite corpse idea a lot, the monster with many heads and bodies. I sat down at the entrance to the theatre where they make tea and I asked the groups of people there to help me translate the idea of the monster, magic, something powerful, transformation... It was Bourama, the theatre's caretaker, who gave me the word, explaining that "Siguifin" refers to a magical being in the Bambara language. I found it very apt given the idea of the project, with its air of mystery, and I suggested it to the group.

Ladji Koné: I speak Bambara (Mali's lingua franca - ed.), so my ear senses the word really strongly. I can see this magical being distinctly, just as the trans-

lation suggests. But today, "Siguifin" makes me think of the magic of the encounter, of sharing, of this really strong human experience we had together.

Alioune Diagne: It was also a reference to the monster that lives inside the dancers. How to tame it? How to rouse it? We want to show a reality that surpasses and changes the clichés of what one expects from young dancers from Africa.

Amala Dianor: Throughout the development process, the term incarnated the monstrous and magical aspect of the project. It was colossal, almost impossible, and was almost cancelled by Covid. Yet with each difficulty we encountered, the magic never stopped working! 🗡️

Translated from French by Marty Hiatt & Sam Langer for Gegensatz Translation Collective.

Amala Dianor
Siguifin
 6.8., 17:00 | 7.8., 19:00 | HAU1
 Deutschlandpremiere

ON THE GO WITH MARCOS MORAU (LA VERONAL)



Where are you now?

I'm in Barcelona, about to go to Athens. I'm on a terrace in the Gracia neighborhood having a coffee.

How are you inspired by Luis Buñuel's films and cinematography?

I am inspired by his fascination for building incomprehensible worlds that always appeal to the human condition. His absurdity and his mix between religion, desire and the bewilderment.

What is your favourite film by him?

"The Exterminating Angel".

And your favourite scene?

My favourite scene is from "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie": at a dinner, the diners discover little by little that they are not at a dinner but are onstage, with an audience behind a red curtain.

How do you get started, with ideas or bodies?

I start with ideas, with my drawings, my music, the space where the action will take place. The body comes after.

If your career were a story, how would the narrative go?

I think it would start with a child who liked to draw and invent games and who continues doing the same thing but in various countries around the world, changing coloured pencils for bodies. A boy who has grown a beard and lives on a plane. To be continued.

One thing you would like to tell your audience before the performance?

LA VERONAL has not been back in Berlin for more than two years now and both I and my team are very happy to finally return to a city where we have precious memories.

Text from Magazin im August 2020.

