

Through the looking glass with B

By GILLES KENNEDY

Bagnolet Choreography Concours is the dance and choreography competition in France each summer that offers hope, encouragement and increased visibility to up-and-coming choreographers.

DANCE

Since so many makers of dance are dancers themselves, the finals are a clear indication of the direction that the art is taking.

Yokohama Dance Collection took place Feb. 6-8 to showcase last year's winners and kick-start the Japan leg of this year's competition this weekend at Landmark Hall in Yokohama. The John Jasperse Company performed "Waving to You from Herc" and Kim Itoh and his company, The Glorious Future, danced the new "3 Sex" and "Dead or Alive."

The John Jasperse Company is a tightly knit unit comprising the choreographer and three women: Jennifer Allen, Juliette Mapp and Parker Lutz. Jasperse, as he explained in a postshow discussion with Itoh, is con-

cerned with making his dance relevant to the experience of the audience.

"Waving to You from Herc" was an eclectic mix of found movement, such as the shifting positions of bodies as the dancers pretended to watch a sports match from the bleachers. Jasperse wove these everyday movements with his own off-kilter release technique movement, which had dancers balancing the limbs of other dancers in their hands before gently pushing them into new positions.

The form of the piece was simple and effective: the four dancers moving between a back set of stairs (doubling for the bleachers and much else), a gradually descending ceiling installation of squares of meshlike material and costumes which progressively grew smaller. It was very "through the looking glass" — either the expression of this daily minutiae was making the dancers grow larger than their costumes of shirts and pants, or else their world was closing in on them, right down to the hem on their shirt sleeves.

To a spare score by James Lo (the echoing ping-pong ball piece was a tour de force), the dancers were preoccupied throughout with the repetition of rearrangement, placing books in piles, deftly resorting them and placing them around one another in ever-changing patterns, picking up newspapers laid out in a grid pattern and restacking shopping parcels as the Lo score rang out with the sound of a cash register.

There was a frightening moment when the dancers started to control one another's movements by pinching their skin on the arm, neck or face. The score grinded away like a new train braking on old tracks — so effective we could imagine the smell of asbestos.

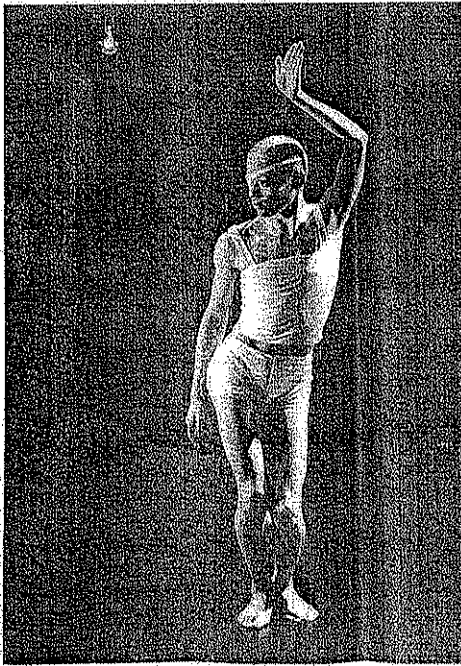
It was funny, razor-sharp and obviously a Bagnolet winner, and although perhaps considered part of the avant-garde in North America, it would hardly be so titled in Asia or Europe. If Jasperse is indeed driving a new train, then he needs to lay some new tracks as well.

And what of provocative,

confrontational, emotional tension? Not really. These performers are comfortable with treating one another like furniture, and their ease communicated itself to the slightly suspicious audience.

Accordingly, the deathly quiet opening of "3 Sex," with its three dancers shrouded under huge umbrellas of a chiffonlike material was unnervingly effective. (They resembled the straw *kasa* that protects the trees from the winter elements in Japan.) Pace took over from repetition, and the tension was absolute as the dancers slowly raised their torsos from a prostrate position under dimly lit light bulbs hanging at the apex of their "tepees."

Their progress to standing position was slow and incremental, their bodies raising slightly more with each gesture, each circling of the arms. Itoh led in a solemn unison pattern of weight shifting, to a slow score of what I think was Mendelssohn, before launching into a heavy-metal frenzy, with huge shadows thrown on the back wall as the dancers careened



TO THE POINT — A winner in last year's Bagnolet Choreography Concours, Kim Itoh presented two works recently prior to this year's competition. ARATA YOSHIMURA PHOTO

king glass with Bagnolet

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about like broken robots.

Although this section was emphatically not his finest hour, that came next with a much reworked "Dead or Alive." Three naked men, heads bowed, crossed the stage at a diagonal, hands coyly covering their faces and genitals. They spread out and revolved slowly in three spots as Itoh moved across the stage in a frieze of sculptured positions, torso flung back with each "step" on his knees.

The dancers became more frenzied in their revolutions, gradually bringing their hands away from their faces and wrenching at their genitals in a similar effort, but remained stymied by their own censorship.

Itoh used this motif to express the confusion that people feel about revealing their personalities and sexuality. "The face and the genitals seem to be the parts of our body that we are most ashamed of," he said. When asked by a member of the audience if freeing Japan's strong censorship laws about displaying full nudity on stage

would allow him greater creative freedom, Itoh was direct and to the point.

"Creativity is not bound by laws on nudity, although I sometimes regret Japan's poverty of cultural acceptance," he said. "But the whole point of this piece is to cover the face and the genitals — to show the entire body would ruin my message."

After the three dancers left the stage, Itoh performed another great "white [costumed] solo" in Japanese contemporary movement. Like Ushio Amagatsu in San-kaijuku and Kazuo Ohno and Saburo Teshigawara in solo work, Itoh held the audience spellbound as he executed slow balletic positions and turned a formal piece into a soft, delicate unfolding of broken limbs with tremendous power and pathos.

The winner of this year's Japan platform of the Bagnolet Choreography Concours is announced Sunday after the final set shows its paces from 4 p.m. One of the most interesting contenders is the duo Op. Ekkekt from Kyoto, performing mime and other pieces which kindly lampoon august Japanese traditions and social intercourse.

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TÊTE D'AFFICHE

Elsa Wolliaaston, l'essence de la danse



« J'ai grandi au village », se plaît-elle à dire. Le village africain, faut-il préciser. Années décisives, où Elsa Wolliaaston, quelque peu délaissée par un père diplomate et une mère new-yorkaise, sitôt mariés, sitôt séparés, poussait en toute liberté auprès d'une grand-mère magique, de celles qui vous apprennent tout, et laissent en vous, ancré à jamais, le souvenir d'un paradis perdu. Un paradis,

bien sûr, sans cesse à reconquérir.

C'est probablement ce que cherche, depuis bientôt un demi-siècle, l'immense danseuse qu'est devenue, au fil des années, la Kenyane Elsa Wolliaaston. Sa danse de terre, sa danse de ciel, cette danse qu'on ne peut qualifier autrement qu'essentielle, elle la doit à coup sûr à cette tradition africaine, à cette vie heureuse de petite fille qui découvrait aussi la musique sur le piano du couvent qui jouxtait le village.

L'adolescence atteinte, elle débarquera à New York, découvrira sa mère, les duretés de l'adaptation urbaine, mais aussi les meilleurs professeurs, de musique et de danse, à la Carnegie School of Music.

D'une capitale l'autre, Elsa débarquera enfin à Paris à la fin des années 60. Elle y deviendra l'un des professeurs les plus réputés de la nouvelle génération, formant à partir de 1976 avec le Japonais Hideyuki Yano le groupe Mâ, dont le travail sans frontières influencera plus d'un futur chorégraphe.

Après *Rivière Sumida Folie*, un duo inoubliable interprété avec Yano, après ses propres soli, à travers les pièces qu'elles composent depuis dix ans pour d'autres danseurs, Elsa Wolliaaston est devenue incontournable. Elle représente légitimement la France aux cinquièmes Rencontres internationales de danse de Bagnolet.

Chantal AUBRY

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