

L'Homme à tête de chou

An interview with Jean-Claude Gallotta extracts

Alain Bashung “crossed over to the other side” on 14 March 2009, after you had been working with him for three years on a project to put on a show based on Gainsbourg’s “l’Homme à tête de chou”...

Absence was part of this artistic adventure from the outset – the absence of Gainsbourg, and of Marilou, the central character in the *l’Homme à tête de chou* album. I was working on this idea for the show and had talked to Alain Bashung about it. And then he absented himself too. We knew he was ill, but we thought he’d be with us through to the end, that he’d come and see the show and even take part in it, live, one evening. What remains is the wonderful gift that he has offered us, with the help of Denis Clavaizolle and Jean Lamoot, of having re-orchestrated, arranged, sung and recorded for us the album that he was still working on in the last few weeks of his life.

It’s an amazing project: Gainsbourg, Bashung, Gallotta. What brought it about?

The adventure actually started quite a long time ago. Gainsbourg and Bashung were among the artists who inspired me. In my own way, I’ve always felt that I belonged to that family of artists. A few years ago, Bashung and I began to have closer contact; he was looking to bring dance into his concerts. And in 2006, the producer Jean-Marc Ghanassia, who had noticed the rapport between us, suggested that we worked together on this project.

We both reacted very quickly to the proposition; we met again and immediately felt at ease with each other. We had the same references. We became friends. To show that he was interested in the adventure, Bashung soon found time to re-orchestrate and record the whole album.

Is putting the show together a major break with your previous work or a form of continuity?

It’s both. I’m still totally in line with what I’ve been trying to do for many years, which is to “immerse” contemporary dance in other worlds. I’ve done it with rock songs, jazz, Khmer music, Bach, Kurt Weill, Janacek, Pascal Dusapin and Lully a few months ago. But it’s also a break because contemporary dance and songs belong to two different worlds, they’re different forms of energy, different types of challenge and sometimes a different audience, so we somehow have to get them to live together.

What technical problems has this adaptation posed?

It hasn't posed many more problems than a normal show. It must be said that Alain Bashung did some tremendous work. Without ever compromising the original work, and always with the greatest respect, he extended the thirty-two minutes of songs by Gainsbourg to provide an hour and ten minutes of musical continuity, with musical passages used to link the tableaux together. All I had to do was compose my ballet in twelve tableaux and with fourteen dancers.

And the dancers won't be required to "illustrate" the story...

No. What I'm looking for is to work with them in a single world that's parallel to the world of the album: it's my way of treating simplicity, violence, desire and absence. The issue of absence is found lurking in the work of both Gainsbourg and Bashung, the politeness of despair, the extreme rigour of the disenchanted. I'd like to see all that circulating between the dancers in a black-and-white universe, I'd like to show something of the latent sadness that the two artists felt along with their tremendous energy. And the dancers won't embody them, they'll simply suggest them, each of them may be filled in turn with the character of Gainsbourg, Bashung, Marilou, and *l'Homme à tête de chou* (Cabbage Head).

Above all, I want to represent an atmosphere, like music hall without the glitter, or with glitter that reflects both the agony and the ecstasy of being alive.

Interview with

Claude-Henri BUFFARD

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