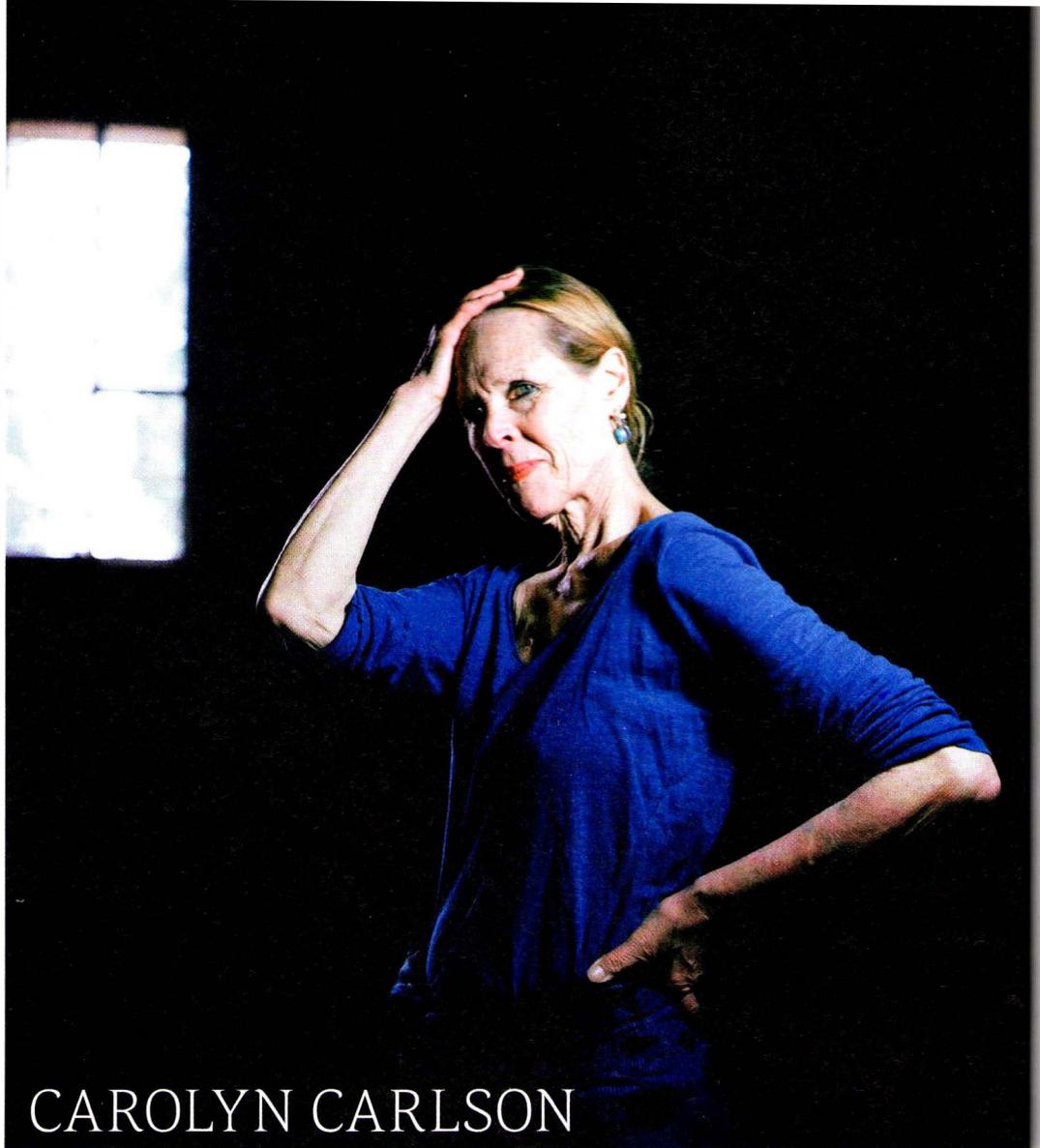


In dance, calligraphy, and poetry, the American choreographer Carolyn Carlson, is on the lookout for expressions of hidden force that push the soul to reveal itself.

By Audrey Fella



CAROLYN CARLSON

THE BREATHE OF THE BODY

"I do not believe in God in the classical sense of the word. But I have always felt a presence, a force around me. All traditions and religions move in the same direction. As I see it, there is a path and it's up to us to make sense of it", confides Carolyn Carlson. Born in 1943, in Oakland, California, in the United States, Carolyn Carlson started classical dance at the San Francisco Ballet school, before going on to the University of Utah. In 1965, she became a soloist for the Alwin Nilokais company, who initiated her to dance as an "expression of the divine", in New York. "When I was dancing, I felt I was burning." In the spiritual effervescence of the 1960's, she also discovered zen Buddhism, martial arts and calligraphy.

Deeply influenced by all these disciplines, the novel concepts of movement and Alwin Nikolais's teaching, she reached Paris in 1971. A year later, she created her first show in Avignon, *Rituel pour un rêve mort*, which is penetrated by philosophy and spirituality. An artistic choice that marked all her future works. "Dance is an experience of the presence which brings us back to the essential, the here and now. It is the expression of everyone's soul." Further, she qualifies her choreographies as "visual poetry". "I work first with poetry in my calligraphy. The poetry possesses an intrinsic power that is at the heart of our dreams and our philosophical questions on existence. It raises imagination to the present moment."

From that point, there is only one objective: develop a form of complete

art where meditation and improvisation occupy a special place, and open the spectator up to another perception of life through the body, the heart and the spirit.

A PURE GESTURE

Wishing to share her artistic and spiritual world, Carolyn Carlson began a nomadic life throughout the world. In 1974, she was named principal choreographer at the Paris Opera Ballet and then created the GR TOP (theatrical research group). From 1980 to 2002, she was called on to direct numerous theaters including the Teatrodanza La Fenis in Venice, the Helsinki City Theater Dance Company, the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm and the dance section of the Venice Biennale, and so contributing to the development of contemporary dance.

“ CAROLYN CARLSON'S QUOTE

Nul ne peut prétendre

« Derrière chaque visage / Un gardien du silence / Se salue
 Si tu détruisais tes illusions / Jusqu'à l'épuisement / Pourrais-tu
 souffrir / La lumière aveuglante de l'Omniscient
 Souffle de Vie / Seigneur fais sonner le vent / À mes oreilles / Afin que
 je me souviens / De Ton souffle / Et que telles les frères fleurs des
 champs / Je m'incline devant Ta volonté
 Au-delà de chaque chose / Le mystère
 Ceux qui offrent / Ceux qui saisissent / Les invisibles désirs
 Cette humilité de devenir / Le rien / Face à la vacuité d'un univers
 Le visage dévoilé / Par la loi cosmique
 Nul ne peut prétendre à l'immensité / À moins qu'il ne s'incline devant /
 Tout ce qui est. »

Extraits de *Le Soi et le Rien* (Actes Sud, 2002, trad. A. Deriaz)

In 1999, in between, she founded the Carolyn Carlson Atelier Paris which is installed in the Cartoucherie in Vincennes. In the end, the choreographer created numerous shows that gained an international reputation including *Density 21.5*, *Enivrez-vous*, *The Year of the horse*, *Blue Lady*, *Steppe*, *Maa*, *Don't look back*, *Inanna*, etc. She received the Lion d'or – the first awarded for a choreography – at the Dance Biennale in Venice in 2006. From 2004 to 2013, she directed the Roubaix Nord-Pas-de-Calais National Center for Choreography where she continued to create notable works including *We were horses*, in collaboration with Bartabas, the horseman-set designer, and *Dialogue with Rothko* in homage to the abstract painter of the same name. Starting in 2007, she created short pieces called *Short Stories* – “the most accomplished shape of my spiritual process” -, solos and duets interpreted by the dancers. Here again, dance appears as an expression of hidden forces that draw the body's movements and carry the soul to reveal itself.

TO READ

Carolyn Carlson, de l'intime à l'universel

Thierry Delcourt (Actes Sud, 2015).

SOME DATES

1943 / Bith in Oakland, United States.

1965-1971 / Soloist in Alwin Nikolais' company.

1974-1980 / Étoile-choreographer at the Ballet of the Paris Opera.

1999 / Create the Atelier de Paris-Carolyn Carlson.

2004-2013 / Runs the Roubaix Nord-Pas-de-Calais National Center.

2014 / Creates the Carolyn Carlson Company, in residency at Théâtre national de Chaillot.

“Intimately connected to the elements, the dancer is the go between the earth and sky, the passer to life's mystical voyage.” Further, the solo is “an experience that is interiorized and a truth for the dancer seeking a unique and pure gesture. It's also an intimate dialogue between the dancer and the spectator who can share their solitude.”

THIS INVISIBLE REALITY

In parallel to dance, Carolyn Carlson is the author of calligraphies and poems which resonate like haikus, on love, silence, death and other subjects. In 2001, she published different works including *Le Soi et le Rien* in 2001, *Dialogue with Rothko*

(which is at the origin of her solo) in 2011, then *Traces d'encre* in 2013, where the writing and the stroke, like movement, speak to her “search for invisible reality” and “the expression of her deep humanity.” The breath is at the heart of the practice of calligraphy, it liberates the energy which enables the stroke.

“Calligraphy is a path for attention and spontaneity. Contrary to dance which disappears into space and the spectator's memory, it leaves a visible trace on paper.” At the heart of her creative process, it has thus inspired numerous choreographies or “living calligraphies” by the artist including *Signes* and *Writings on Water*.

DANCE AS THE MESSENGER

In January 2014, the choreographer created the Carolyn Carlson Company which took residence at the Chaillot National Theater for two seasons. In *Now*, she invited the spectator to a meditation on the present moment and the place s/he takes in space, and from where s/he must transcend the world's materiality and allow the divine to burst forth. To do so, she drew inspiration from concepts by Gaston Bachelard, such as “*dialects of inside and outside*” and “*intimate immensity*”, developed in his book *The Poetics of Space*. In her next show, *Seeds (back to the land)*, she evokes a theme she holds dear: nature. “*We are all seeds that must grow up. Like them, we carry in us the mystery of life, that of death and renewal, of growth of the conscious.*” As many forms as subjects for Carolyn Carlson that allow her to transmit her spiritual values like the prophets in all the traditions. “*I am a messenger, with no pretension. Transmission is life. We transmit all the time. Dance makes it possible to directly transmit spiritual energy from one person to another and to wake up the soul. Everyone is a unique being who must open up to the divine. And a word, a presence, can change a life.* » I

(1) *Dialogue with Rothko* est programmé du 5 au 7 février 2016 au Théâtre national de Chaillot avant une tournée en France.

(2) *Now* a été créé du 6 au 16 novembre

Toutes les dates sont sur carolyn@carlson.com