

**CARLOTTA IKEDA**  
**COMPAGNIE ARIADONE**

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**WAITING**

**PRESS**

Contact :

Samuel DESSENOIX / Aurélie FAVRE  
64, rue Surson - 33 300 Bordeaux  
Tel (33) 05 56 39 16 77 - [ariadone@wanadoo.fr](mailto:ariadone@wanadoo.fr)  
[www.ariadone.fr](http://www.ariadone.fr)

## CARLOTTA IKEDA: the raw intimacy of Butoh

At 63 years of age, choreographer Ikeda is still a benchmark for this dance movement born in Japan in the 1960s. The wild embodiment of the mystery of the flesh, she is in Paris to present "Togué".

She still speaks French as poorly as before, apologising while laughing as if of a joke. Japanese choreographer Carlotta Ikeda has been living in Bordeaux for more than twenty years now, without the language having been a problem for her. *"I often forget that I am Japanese. I do not get homesick for my country. Sometimes I miss very small things such as the smell of wood in a house"*. Her mischievous laugh says it all, as does the way she screws up her eyes to really grasp what you are saying, adjusting her answer accordingly. Her dance, in particular, goes right to the heart of the matter, journeying to the roots of the soul, free from all references. One need only recall the way she called to mind Marguerite Duras in 1997 whilst producing her solo 'Waiting' based on the author's works. *"When I read Duras, I do not understand anything, but I can feel very strong emotions. My body tenses up merely through reading her words... The energy of Marguerite Duras is like that of an animal. Her words are bones and muscle. All her body is in her writing. I find that moving"*.

When confronted with Carlotta Ikeda, listening to her disjointed vernacular, not everything can be understood, but her words can be defined through the gesticulations of her muscled hands which make up for the holes in her vocabulary. At 63 years old, she is still the indisputable feminine figurehead of Butoh, the ashen choreographic movement that sprang out of Japan in the 1960s. Nurtured on Antonin Artaud, Lautréamont and Sade, this *"dance of darkness"* rose up against the decline of Japan and American colonisation. In opposition to all aestheticisms, Butoh claims to convey the archaic truth of the being, however troubling that might be. What do you dance after the a-bomb has fallen, for instance? In Kinjiki ("Forbidden colours", based on a text by Yukio Mishima), Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986), the founder of the movement, staged an adolescent imitating a love scene with a chicken before suffocating it between his legs. In 1959. Barely twenty years later, in Paris at the Carré Silvia-Monfort, spectators discovered what had become of this theatre of cruelty through the naked white bodies curled up in foetal position, with their mouths open like black holes.

"Today, I do not like being labelled as Butoh, even if it is the dance of my beginnings," holds forth she who was its avant-garde ambassadress. "I bid to find my way in the Butoh spirit, which is to constantly challenge oneself. At the time, it was a revelation. I was at the University of Tokyo, having learned to dance and worked on classical technique, which remains essential for being at one with your body, but I had come up against a brick wall. After seeing Hijikata in the 1970s, I knew I had found the solution to break that wall down". Finding the way through dance is the leitmotif of Carlotta Ikeda, free spirit and pioneer, whose company is not called Ariadone for nothing; Ariane and her thread as a metaphor for the innermost maze, the perilous quest for the self. Even if she broke into dance late on whilst still giving gym lessons in Tokyo's schools, Carlotta likes to say that she has always been a dancer.

### A BRUTAL SEX SHOW

Born in a village on the coast of the Sea of Japan, she was in raptures over the creative movements that sprung from her young girl's instinctive body. *"My father, who came from Samurai stock, was a civil servant, and my mother, who liked traditional dances, reared animals,"* she recalls, with visible happiness. *"I used to go for walks in the country and I got high on the smell of grass and the nuances of the atmosphere, dancing all the while"*. At the time, Carlotta was called Sanae, which means "shoot of rice", whilst Ikeda means "little lake". She chose her pseudonym in reference to the Italian dancer Carlotta Grisi, who achieved fame at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *"to emphasise the insurmountable opposition between ballet and Butoh"*, but also to highlight the conflict of a very singular personality. At 30 years old, whilst continuing her research with the Butoh group Dairakuda-Ka and choreographer Ko Murobushi, who remains her partner of choice, she took part in cabaret shows, as a gold-powdered icon in a brutal sex show. *"When I was performing my strip-tease, I had a single objective: that the people who were there stop laughing, quieten down and watch me for fifteen minutes. I eventually managed to achieve my aim and started to find my dance style"*.

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This experience of raw nudity and commercial eroticism hardened the theatrical approach of this woman who does not shy away from putting on stage the extreme states of the body. When speaking of the month spent at the Carré Silvia-Monfort, in 1978, dancing every evening, she declares that, *"I finished the performances in such a state that I felt as if the wind had blown right through me"*. Those who have seen Ikeda on stage will know that this declaration is in no way an exaggeration. Through minimalist movements, imperceptible shivers, intense hot flushes, she delves into the chasm of the mystery of the flesh.

The art of Carlotta Ikeda has evolved from its more deadly beginnings toward a bitter trance which is not without a dose of acerbic humour. Carlotta Ikeda succeeds in embodying the riddle of life with such power that she is almost frightening. *"My dance is neither a special form nor technique, but instead suppression of the self, a sort of void. Before the body, the spirit withdraws. My quest is sometimes situated at the boundaries of normality and madness. Even if today, I do not roll my eyes back into my head, looking inward is still the key. The eyes are sunken into the head, seeking something inside"*.

Carlotta Ikeda has always been on intimate terms with the limits. In the same style as her solo 'Utt', produced in 1981, 'Waiting' concentrates on the different stages in the life of a woman, from childhood to old age, via adolescence and motherhood. Life and death, pleasure and pain; everything is tied up in the same knot. *"It is the first time that I felt like a woman"*, she comments. *"The stage is the only place where I attain self-fulfilment. My life is my dance and vice versa. I evolve through my performances, reaching a sort of pure state of life. My savageness has hardly changed over time"*. She murmurs this, as one would for a secret. What preoccupies her is to transmit to her young dancers this brutality which prevailed, in 1980, during creation of Zarathoustra, the mythical performance that will be revisited in 2005.

**Rosita Boisseau**

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## The Place

### Carlotta Ikeda

For her solo, *Waiting*, Carlotta Ikeda draws on Butoh which, as anyone tuned into this Japanese art form knows, means the time of day ceases to be an issue and one wonders instead whether the century will end before the show.

Ikeda at least manages to keep her piece within the hour, and while she starves us of physical energy, her work is elegantly presented and is imbued with a tailored artiness.

*Waiting* is inspired by Marguerite Duras' reflections of a childhood spent in Indo-China, and an old recording of the French novelist's voice accompanies the first of Ikeda's sensual sketches of a string of vulnerable characters. Clothed in a sea of tulle and a boned corset which finishes below her breasts, Ikeda moves jerkily from one crumpled position on the floor to another, her long dark hair frequently covering her white painted face.

From this pathetic, dying creature, she metamorphoses into a young woman, fidgeting as slowly as it is possible to move on a chair. She then becomes sexually awakened and splays her legs shamelessly.

All movements are effected employing as little effort as possible, and yet Ikeda succeeds in portraying volumes in terms of human suffering, incest, love and hope.

With its orchestra of insects, the atmospheric soundscape accentuates the unworldly slowness, and Michel Boulanger's set, comprising four suspended

stones swaying gently like pendulums on their last ebbings, and a distressed tree robbed of branches save for one leafy twig, is quite perfect.

Emma Manning

## The Place

### Maliphant/ David Hughes

However brilliantly crafted, however finely danced, five solos in one evening is too much, and both Russell Maliphant and David Hughes would have been better served by a small company work than with each other's pieces. There is only so much a dancer can say when holding the stage on his own.

This programming quibble aside, the works themselves were eminently watchable. Maliphant opened the proceedings with *I*, a new choreography to a disjointed score of repeated musical phrases. His classically trained body moves like a cat, and he can make a scramble across the floor look like a graceful exercise. Juxtaposing caution with energy, this piece, while not capturing the visual heights of his earlier *Shift*, is still pure class.

Created by Maliphant with Dana Fouras, and danced by the latter, *II* uses another score by Andy Cowton, with a bit of Bach thrown in. Performed within the confines of a square of light, the initial movement is low-powered and concerns itself with a strange need to turn oneself inside out. But, as the music gains in pace, Fouras erupts and concludes with a thrilling physical climax.

Robert Cohan's choreography for *Adagietto*, the first of Hughes' two solos, dared to use Mahler's *Symphony No.5*, and one would be pushed to think of a more impassioned score. It was almost not fair that he was only allowed a chair; with music like this you need a partner if not the love of your life.

With a different build and training from Maliphant, Hughes moves more hungrily, and his performance is altogether weightier and more dynamic. His second solo, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, choreographed by Siobhan Davies and set to Debussy, was memorable for its balance of restraint and impulse, and was equally absorbing.

Emma Manning