



"Transports exceptionnels" is billed as a duet between a man and an excavator.

Man and machine: an unlikely dance couple

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As part of İstanbul's sixth International Contemporary Dance and Performance Festival, iDANS, a very unusual public performance will be conducted at Barbaros Square in the Beşiktaş district this weekend.

Titled "Transports exceptionnels," the performance is a duet between a man and an excavator. French contemporary dancer Dominique Boivin, who choreographed the performance, summarizes it in the festival's brochure as follows: "The dancer meets, greets, and embraces a moving excavator, transforming the stage into a construction site and dance into a tentative balance between nature, man, and machine."

As to why he chose an excavator as a non-human element for his piece, Boivin explains that he was interested in bringing together two elements that would not encounter each other normally. "Everybody knows what an excavator looks like. On construction sites, it is mostly used to demolish things, but sometimes also to build new ones. The excavator is present in our everyday lives and belongs to the urban landscape, whereas the dancer comes from a more sophisticated world and usually works indoors, like in studios or theaters," he said in an e-mail interview with Today's Zaman.

"Somehow, the excavator and the dancer will have little chance to 'meet.' What I'm interested in is to connect these two 'dancing' elements and to create a romantic duet between two faraway universes. Moreover, the machine gradually becomes a huge marionette, a self-operating machine with a hidden driver, which allows us to focus on the dance and on the movements," Boivin further explained, adding that for those who absolutely need to make a story out of it, he just suggested thinking of "King Kong."

The choreographer also noted the duet is based on a famous aria sung by Maria Callas, which gives an opera-like atmosphere to the whole piece. "The music strengthens the relations between the machine and the dancer, while the aria creates a vivid tension that allows the audience to really engage with the movements of the machine," he added, pointing out that as far as the costume is concerned, it epitomizes a typical man's costume with a white shirt and black trousers, with nothing else, without a hidden agenda. "Besides, I was hoping that the pristine white of the shirt would be smeared with potential stains from the machine."

Trust is a major part of the choreography since the performer has to trust not only the operator of the machine but the machine itself as well. Asked what this element of trust adds to the performance, Boivin noted that all precautions are taken to ensure the safety of the dancer and of the driver. "The tense moments during the duet -- physical difficulties, dangerous situations, etc. -- have been prepared with meticulous care in order to avoid any risk. One could think of certain circus acts that give us the shivers and, yet, circus performers do rehearse a lot as not to risk their lives," he said.

According to Boivin, this duet is actually a trio with a driver, a dancer and a singer. "I believe they have a strong relationship and that there is no need to add other dancers or machines. I've already tried it and it didn't work out, that is why I always come back to a more direct and simpler relation between this urban machine and the dancer," he explained.

"Transports exceptionnels," which has been performed hundreds of times all around the globe, will be performed in İstanbul by dancer Philippe Priasso and the machine will be operated by Eric Lamy and William Defresne in four performances: on Oct. 20 and 21 at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Beşiktaş's Barbaros Square. For more information, visit www.idans.info.