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Speaking without words

Dubai-based choreographer, Nadine Thouin, hopes to teach new, inventive ways of communicating

On any given Thursday night, throngs of people descend on Dubai's many nightspots to hit the dance floor and show off their moves.

But did you ever imagine that the 'bump and grind' is more than just a dance move? As far as communication goes, a little hip swaying can go a long way. In fact, for Nadine Thouin, an internationally acclaimed multidisciplinary artist and choreographer, dance is the ultimate form of communication. Body language, she says, is the oldest form of expression. Thouin arrived on Dubai's shores four months ago with the singular mission of bringing dance, along with performance art, to the forefront of cultural communication; something she says has yet to be fully discovered here.

"I think a thriving economy and strong development needs to be preceded by a strong base of culture. Dubai is the ultimate challenge because it is the opposite."

According to Thouin, Dubai sometimes feels like an empty shell, and if it stays that way then it's never going to be powerful or inventive.

"With everyone looking in from the outside, Dubai needs to be communicating on a cultural level and using a language that speaks over and above words. That will take time and it's simply a question of integrating things slowly with respect to the local culture and tradition."

So how does she hope to achieve this? Thouin believes, that through multidisciplinary performances that fuse images, theatre, music, art and her own style of dance (that is neither contemporary nor modern, but something critics define as "unclassifiable"), a new expression will emerge from the city.

Thouin hails from Canada, but considers herself first and foremost a traveller of the world. Since the age of 17 (she is now a remarkably fit 40-year-old), she has lived in all corners of the globe. She has performed in 20 countries and 40 cities during her 25 year career, including a ten-year stint in China, where she picked up Mandarin. Incidentally, Thouin was the first Canadian modern dancer to perform in Mainland China and is the representative consultant for Cirque du Soleil there. Dancing is second nature to Thouin, an art she has perfected ever since she started at the age of four.

She challenges herself to communicate by using her body in new, uncharted territories through her company, Go-On. "The closest description to what I do is what a critic once called 'living cinema'. Wherever I perform, from Poland to Paris to Africa, people are touched. And this is

why I am so excited about the challenge that Dubai represents", she adds.

For Thouin, who has been described as an ambassador of cultural development (a title she is comfortable assuming), Dubai and the region offer exciting prospects.

"The local culture is so rich and with such deep roots. I mean the calligraphy alone is so inspiring. I have many ideas of things to do using these references from the region," she says.

One regional observation that Thouin is interested in exploring is the abayas women wear and using it as a jumping point for communicating in a new way. In contrast to the extreme exposure in the West, Thouin believes that the flash of hands, eyes or feet from behind an abaya sends out a very loud message that needs to be heard.

"It's more powerful than any language we could ever invent. The Gulf as a region is ready to communicate, and that is the best challenge."

A glimpse of the communication she creates was seen in April when she performed during the second Pecha Kucha night hosted at the Third Line Gallery. In collaboration with 14 local performers from various artistic backgrounds, she conceived 'Dust to Concrete' - a piece about a grain of sand to a 250-storey building which took only 25 hours to plan and choreograph.

Tomorrow, an extended performance, 'Mix Dementia' will take place at a new space in Al Quoz called The Fridge. Using every corner of the warehouse and joined by ten local performers, Thouin's piece will incorporate mixed media to reflect the chaos of modern life, using the seemingly haphazard inner workings of the human body (imagine looking inside the body) as inspiration.

With Thouin leading the spectators through what she calls a 'hit and run' performance (meaning a one-time only event) she hopes to capture the crazy pace of the world we live in.

In addition to creating these 'hit and run' performances, Thouin has planted many seeds across Dubai that she hopes will come to fruition over the course of the next year and set the momentum for the cultural awakening she is expecting.

"I'm trying to teach performers to have no limits in how they express themselves through images, body and music - the complete expression of self, identity and power."

"I do believe everyone is inherently an artist - anyone can do it, even a banker! It's about reprogramming ourselves to use our own unique expression to communicate and receive," she says.

She believes we have created many false forms of communication that have muddled our understanding of how to see life. And by acting as a guide, Thouin believes this can be reversed, and people will go back to their essence, which is where true power lies.

■ Mix Dementia will be performed tomorrow, June 4, at 8pm at The Fridge in Al Quoz. Entrance is free. For more information call 04 347 7793 or email enquiries@thefridge.ae or visit www.go-on.ae.



JUMP, JUMP:
Nadine Thouin makes a statement in front of Burj Dubai

Photo by: Faral Averill

