

Dance

Tributes to Nijinsky & Dutilleux, Paris Philharmonie – review

A concert hall designed for music showed that it can effectively host dance, too



Robert Swinston's Dutilleux tribute, 'Paysages poétiques' © Charlotte Audureau
Laura Cappelle OCTOBER 25, 2016

In the race to complete the [Paris Philharmonie](#) in time for its grand opening in 2015, dance was presumably the last thing on the mind of architect Jean Nouvel. His spaceship-like concert hall was designed with acoustics in mind, and curved balconies surround the orchestra's stage. The rows situated behind it can morph into a traditional proscenium stage, however, and at the weekend the Philharmonie decided to try its hand at dance programming.

The productions were clearly selected with an eye to meaningful dialogue between dance and music. Dominique Brun brought her recreations of three seminal Nijinsky works while Robert Swinston paid tribute to composer Henri Dutilleux with the creation *Paysages poétiques*.

In both cases the unusual set-up of the Philharmonie turned out to be an asset, despite sightline issues and a stripped-down dance stage. The orchestra is level with the dancers instead of being squeezed into a pit; both are given equal prominence, and the visual conversation is compelling.

The sensuality of the two Debussy scores used by Nijinsky was beautifully rendered by Les Siècles, an ensemble specialising in period instruments. Notes seemed to linger in the air, accentuating the slow, frieze-like choreography for *Afternoon of a Faun*, reconstructed from Nijinsky's score. The absence of Léon Bakst's landmark scenography was an issue, but a rising star from the Paris Opera Ballet, François Alu, made a charismatic Faun.

There are no records of the choreography for Nijinsky's *Jeux*, however, and Brun's reinvention proved subdued. Her *Rite of Spring* was more convincing, albeit quite different from the Hodson/Archer production performed by many companies. It shows the limits of reconstruction from partial sources, but Brun's contemporary performers, spurred on by the orchestra, proved more attuned to *Rite's* earthiness and inverted shapes than most ballet dancers.

Paysages poétiques brought more modern fare. Robert Swinston, a long-time assistant of Merce Cunningham, settled in Angers in 2013, and this creation is a collaboration with the local Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire. The choreography for *Métaboles* and *L'Arbre des songes* is well crafted in the Cunningham tradition, but as academic as modern dance gets. Swinston was at his

best with Dutilleux's *Mystère de l'instant*, his four dancers seemingly wandering in a nightmare, crawling or collapsing on the floor.

On both nights it was heartening to see the dancers and the musicians warmly applaud each other. If the Philharmonie wants to invest in a regular dance series, a number of musically inclined choreographers would be right at home there, from Balanchine to Mark Morris.

★★★★☆ philharmoniedeparis.fr

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