



# PHILOSOPHY OR CHOREOGRAPHY?

## States/Arco Renz — Bellone Briggittines

DANS / DANSE / DANCE

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**EN** The Bellone Briggittines dance festival opens with two evenings made up of three short productions, including the solo *States* by the choreographer Arco Renz, who has another solo work later in the festival.

Renz (born in 1971) is from Bremen, but has lived in Brussels for over ten years. One of the first graduates from the PARTS dance school in 1998, he quickly built up an impressive reputation both in Belgium and abroad.

**You might easily have finished up on live ballroom dancing programmes on German TV.**

**ARCO RENZ:** My parents are ballroom dancers, yes. They have a school in Bremen, which my sister runs now, and they used to be professional dancers in competition back in the 1960s. So I was confronted with dance from a very early age. I grew up in the house where the school was located. People were constantly moving, but I especially remember the music that was played there all the time. At a very young age I realized though

that I didn't want to do ballroom dancing. So my parents put me in ballet class, which I didn't like either. After that I went on to study theatre until finally I returned to professional dancing. I wanted to say what I couldn't think, which was not possible for me within the framework of traditional theatre.

**After courses in Berlin and Paris you ended up in P.A.R.T.S. What made you decide to stay?**

**RENZ:** I came to Brussels almost by coincidence. I attended a preparation workshop the year before P.A.R.T.S. started, and at the end of it I decided to stay for the adventure that this new programme promised. P.A.R.T.S. has definitely been a very important step in my development and I think I stayed because Brussels is a very good environment to create in. To describe that

you would have to use all those stereotypes about the city being one big train station and everyone being a passer-by, but they don't say too much. Brussels is indeed a crossroads, where you always have to redefine yourself – especially as an artist. Every time I come back here I feel I have to rethink my position in this rapidly changing environment. The city has also changed incredibly over the last ten years. The "project" Brussels has started, whatever it is. You can feel this impulse which is absent in most other European cities. I go a lot to Asia and one thing that strikes me when I return to Europe is that we seem to be somewhat asleep. Not everybody of course, but the general tendency seems to be that people in Europe don't want to lose what they have, while in Asia millions of people just want to go into the future. And Brussels is one of the few cities in Europe where you also feel the potential lies in the future.

**Your travels in Asia have had a big influence**



States © Jean-Luc Tanghe

**on your work as a choreographer. How did that come about?**

**RENZ:** During one of my tours with Robert Wilson (the famous US director-choreographer, with whom Renz collaborated between 1997 and 2004 - ed.) I got involved with a cultural exchange program of the Bali Purnati Foundation of the Arts in Indonesia (from which the *Dreamlands* production emerged in 2003). That was in 2000; but I had always had the intention to work in Asia. I think it all started when I saw a Kathakali performance, which is an Indian dance form. It was a performance of more than three hours, and I didn't understand anything of the language, the conventions, or the story, but I was totally captivated and fascinated by it. And that was not just exoticism. It had to do with the energy the performers projected onstage. Dance is an international language that enables you to work with people from countries all over the world. In the case of this Kathakali performance I felt it came from a place very far away - and yet something bound me to those performers. In traditional Asian performing arts you often become an accomplished performer only when you're in your forties and later, while in the Western dance tradition you finish when you're 30 or 35. Dance here still often has a certain affinity with acrobatics, where physically difficult, technically virtuoso movements are displayed. Asian performing arts are much more about the perfection of subtle qualities during a performance, and a different use of time and of space. The Asian performer will change the perception of space around him, while we have the tendency to go into the space and move all over the place. These are differences that I try to explore. *Heroïne*, for instance, which will be shown at the Brigittinenkapel/la Chapelle des Brigittines,

**FR** Vendredi, le festival de danse Bellone Brigittines sera inauguré par une soirée d'ouverture composée de trois représentations courtes, dont le solo *States* du chorégraphe bruxellois Arco Renz. Dans la suite du programme, la danseuse taïwanaise Su Wan-Chi dansera son solo *heroïne*.

**NL** Vrijdag begint het dansfestival Bellone Brigittines met een openingsavond samengesteld uit drie korte voorstellingen. De solo *States* van de Brusselse choreograaf Arco Renz is er daar één van. (De Nederlandstalige versie van dit artikel vindt u op [www.brusselnieuws.be/agenda](http://www.brusselnieuws.be/agenda))

is a piece that deals directly with that other idea of space.

**It will be performed by the Taiwanese dancer Su Wen-Chi.**

**RENZ:** The solo is really made for her. I don't think anybody else could dance it. I'm not interested in copy/pasting or remixing styles of traditional Asian performing arts. While making the piece we tried to have a meeting underneath the different styles and shapes and techniques. It's difficult to explain how that works. We tried to start nowhere so nobody would be at home, and one of the starting points was that we would do only one thing. So it is not a piece with one scene following another. There is no succession of events; it's more one suspended event, so to say. Cyclical, without coming back to the same point. But there are other starting points. I liked the ambiguity of the name *heroïne*: you have the female hero and the drug (the same word in French - ed.) and I think you can find both in the piece, but that is something to discover yourself. Too much explaining beforehand can take away the audience's freedom.

**On the opening night of the festival you dance *States*, an early work.**

**RENZ:** *States* is also a solo, but it has a completely different character. It shows a different person in a different situation. The piece was created in 2001 and has experienced many mutations since. In the original version it is one hour long and has four parts. On the opening night I will only dance one part, which lasts about 23 minutes. *States* is a performance about someone who wants to arrive somewhere, but doesn't. Like Sisyphus in the Greek myth, of whom Camus said that he was a happy hero. But, again, it would be a pity to focus on that

aspect because it could prevent you from seeing other things. In my working process I often take a complex starting point like the Sisyphus myth, and then I try to find a typical expression of the theme that is more abstract but still has that dramatic quality. I translate the theme into another language, the more open language of the body. Recently in Asia somebody argued that my work was more that of a philosopher than of a choreographer. "But as a philosopher, do you think your work has anything to do with society?", this man asked. That was in China, where art often serves as a direct comment on the social situation, but the question struck me as an important one. Perhaps I'm a philosopher because I ask questions. But since my language is very abstract I don't tell the audience, "Well, the situation we have here is so and so and we have to change it." Let's say my discourse is much more basic, and at the same time more universal - although I don't like that word. It deals with simple parameters that everybody shares: time, space, and physical energy. So it doesn't deal directly with specific social or political problems, but more with the pattern of problems, or almost the archetype of a problem. I think, for instance, everybody deals with the "problem" of heroin in some way. You can recognise it or not, but if you do, you discover the connection between the abstract work and the world that surrounds it.

• 18 & 19.8.2006 (Openingsavonden/Soirées d'ouverture/Opening evenings, Brigittinenkapel/Chapelle des Brigittines, 20.30): *Duet*, Kris Verdonck; *Des taureaux dans la tête*, Karine Ponties; *States*, Arco Renz/Kobalt Works  
 • 28.8.2006 (Brigittinenkapel/Chapelle des Brigittines, 20.30): *heroïne*, Arco Renz/Kobalt Works