

Dance

Raw talent on show at France's Kalypso hip-hop dance festival

Performances at the MAC Créteil pointed to promising avenues for growth



Séverine Bidaud's 'Dis, à quoi tu dances?' © Patrick Berger

YESTERDAY Laura Cappelle

Hip-hop has come a long way in terms of visibility, but for emerging choreographers, booking tour dates often remains an uphill battle. To give them a leg up, one of the pioneers of the genre in France, Mourad Merzouki, launched the Kalypso Festival five years ago. Its network of participating venues is impressive, with 18 theatres in and around Paris hosting events this autumn. This year's programme pointed to welcome avenues for growth.

International collaborations may be one of them. Merzouki kick-started the proceedings with visitors from South America: as part of France-Colombia Year, the choreographer brought *Récital Colombie*, a 1998 work he adapted for a group of Colombian hip-hop dancers. By recasting them as classical musicians in elegant suits, *Récital* works around stereotypes: it's a solid training ground for performers transitioning to the specific demands of theatrical dance, and the Colombian cast rose to the challenge with enthusiastic commitment.

Kalypso includes a week of mixed bills at Merzouki's stamping ground, Créteil's Maison des Arts, and it opened with an evening devoted to female talent. Séverine Bidaud, who has had her own company, 6e Dimension, since 1998, explored three fairy tales in *Dis, à quoi tu dances?*, which lacked structure but displayed real expressive range.

Bidaud herself appeared as the Little Match Girl, gliding around the stage with preternatural ease in the opening scenes. As a choreographer, she has an eye for detail and narrative: *Little Red Riding Hood* came with intricate floor work for the Wolf, while her *Ugly Duckling*, in spite of its over-used *Swan Lake* soundtrack, spun fine comedy out of Cault Nzelo's lively encounter with more disciplined birds.

The less experienced Jessica Noita presented her first work, the solo *Cabine d'essayage*. Its starting point — a lone woman's fraught experience in a changing room — is promising, but gets lost in the second half. Still, Noita is a vivid, no-nonsense performer, especially when she appropriates fashion poses, vogueing-style — only for her bright smiles to morph into utter dejection.

Two all-female groups completed the evening with short performances in the MAC's public areas. *Ma Dame Paris*, by an eponymous trio specialising in waacking technique, mined the latter's trademark articulation of the arms with sharp-witted musicality.

The five-strong Compagnie Bandidas followed with a collective creation, *Bodies and Soul*. The first scene, set to Diana Krall's "Peel Me a Grape", was full of sensuous irony, followed by gangster-style suits and energy. The evening had raw talent to spare: all these choreographers need is bigger commissions.

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