

# Hervé Koubi explores Algerian roots at the ICA

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LOU DAMARS

By **Jeffrey Gantz** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 12, 2016

Looking at the choreography that Compagnie Hervé Koubi executed Friday at the Institute of Contemporary Art's Barbara Lee Family Foundation Theater, you'd hardly guess that Koubi himself trained to be a doctor of pharmacy. Born in Cannes, of Algerian parents, he studied both biology and dance at the University of Aix-en-Provence. Eventually he settled on dance.

Those who saw his "Ce que le jour doit à la nuit" ("What the Day Owes the Night") Friday, in a World Music/CRASHarts presentation, will be glad he did. Compagnie Hervé Koubi made its American debut with the piece at New York's Fall for Dance Festival last October. Created in 2013, it's performed by 12 extraordinary male dancers, all with street-dance backgrounds, whom Koubi selected from a pool of more than 200 at an audition in Algeria in 2009.

It takes its title from a 2008 novel by Yasmina Khadra (pen name of Algerian army officer Mohammed Moulessehouli) about a conflicted young Algerian during his country's war for independence.

Running just over an hour, without intermission, "Ce que le jour doit à la nuit" does not retell the novel; it's a kind of desert prayer in which Koubi reconnects with his Algerian roots. The eclectic score includes Bach and Vivaldi, traditional Sufi music, and a piece by Nubian composer Hamza El Din played by the Kronos Quartet.

The piece begins in darkness, with 12 white blurs on the floor that are gradually illuminated. Barechested, wearing only white trousers and split skirts that suggest a dervish's tennure, the dancers stretch, roll, rise. Soon they're launching themselves into cartwheels, somersaults, backflips, and breakdance headspins, as if they were trying to free the soul from the body.

Most of the intensely physical movement is individual, but every so often a dancer will run up onto the backs of one group and fall into the arms of another, or he'll be thrown high up into the air. There's very little ensemble;

the dancers look as if they were improvising, even as they move in complex counterpoint.

A snatch of “Spring” from Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons” slips into the score early on, but the real interloper to the Sufi ambiance is the opening chorus from the 1724 version of Bach’s “St. John Passion,” to which the movement grows more agitated. Exhausted, some of the dancers lie down and are resurrected by colleagues. A group headstand leads to all 12 dancers forming a chain; then some individual whirling starts. As the music fades out, one dancer speaks in Arabic, the gist of which is “I went there.” If “Ce que le jour doit à la nuit” is what happens when Koubi goes to Algeria, he should go there again.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-dance/2016/03/12/herve-koubi-explores-algerian-roots-ica/CicUeQx6IREgEutb7Bp0SK/story.html>