

## BIOGRAPHY & ARTISTIC CAREER

### **NAWAL AÏT BENALLA**



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Born in Safi, Morocco, to a Berber father and a French mother, Nawal Aït Benalla moved to France with her parents at the age of eight. Rather a tomboy, she rubs shoulders with classical dance, by chance. It acts on her as a teller. It finds its way into the world, a way to anchor itself, to find a backbone.

Ready for other horizons, Nawal decided to move to Paris at the age of 19, where she opened up to jazz and contemporary dance. It incorporates Armstrong Jazz Ballet, where she works with

choreographers Matt Mattox, Georges Momboye, Wayne Barbaste. Then went on a world tour between 2000 and 2001 with DJ Laurent Garnier and experienced an incredible experience, finding themselves on the biggest electronic music stages in front of thousands of spectators in Berlin, Paris, Reykjavik...

An artist open to various forms of experience, she participates as a dancer and actress in ***Cyrano de Bergerac*** by Jacques Weber (2001) and ***Les Troyens*** by Yannis Kokkos (2003) at the Théâtre du Châtelet. In 2003, she met Peter Goss and attended intensive classes in contemporary dance and yoga. Precision, research and analysis of the movement, the path it then marks, quickly leads it to the question of studies aimed at transmission. In 2005, she obtained the State Diploma of Dance Teacher at the CND in Pantin, Paris. Nawal Aït Benalla now knows that her rightful place is within contemporary choreographic creation.

#### **Meeting and Baraka for two**

In 2006, she was among 750 candidates for a week-long audition for ***Matri(K)is***, the creation of Abou Lagraa. She joined ***La Baraka*** first as a dancer. She quickly became a choreography assistant on many of ***La Baraka's*** pieces, notably in Tunis for the ***Mediterranean Centre for Contemporary Dance***, or for the ***Memphis Ballet*** (USA). In 2009, they participated together in the closing ceremony of the ***Pan-African Festival*** in Algiers.

In 2008, Abou Lagraa created with Nawal at the Biennale de la Danse de Lyon, the duo ***D'Eux Sens***, a piece about Omar Khayyām's poems, with which they travelled together throughout Europe until 2011. Driven by Nawal, the couple will go back and forth to their origins on the other side of the Mediterranean. She took over the educational direction of the adventure of creating the first ***Ballet Contemporain d'Alger***, from 2010 to 2015, with nine self-taught hip-hop dancers.

While continuing her educational work during the tours of the ***Ballet Contemporain d'Alger***, she shares her taste for transmission during a master class in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Russia and the United States.

#### **A woman in front and behind the stage**

As a follow-up to the Algerian project, Nawal created in 2014 a creation and training project for seven women, this time self-taught dancers from the neighborhoods of Lyon, ***Femmes sur le devant de la Scène*** (***Women in the Spotlight***).

This gives **Do You Be**, a dyptich with a solo by Nawal that reveals a very beautiful dancer who seems to free herself from her past. In a second part, she gives way to the seven dancers who have won the **Women in the Spotlight** program. In this group play, only the gestures and faces of the interpreters, the depositories of the sediments of a sometimes-trying daily life, testify to the social reality. It is on these tracks that the desires for freedom bounce back.

If the adventure of Baraka for two began with an audition in 2006, it takes all its meaning when in 2014, Nawal and Abou write the project of a place of residence for **La Baraka** and invited companies. The place materializes in the desecrated Sainte-Marie Chapel in Annonay a kind of "Villa Medicis" for dance in Ardèche... Nawal Aït Benalla and Abou Lagraa settle in this renovated space where they decide, together, to co-direct **La Baraka** and **La Chapelle**.

Among other things, she directs projects of inclusion and solidarity through dance, defending the idea that art and social commitment are inextricably linked. In 2018, Nawal, Abou and Edmond de Rothschild Foundations developed the **Premier(s) Pas** program, which offers 360° tailor-made accompaniment for professional dancers. It alternates sessions of creations, trainings and tours. The training offers, among other things, coaching in entrepreneurship and communication.

In 2020 and 2022, the choreographer responded to the commission of the DNSP dance Jazz Paris-Boulogne-Billancourt by creating **Ailleurs (Elsewhere) & Nuée**.

In 2020, she choreographed part 1 of the show **Premier(s) Pas**, world premiere at the Festival Suresnes Cités Danse. We find a work of anchoring to the ground, of progressive release and elevation of the bodies towards their individuality. Great attention to the personality of each dancer himself. Nawal acts as a revealer. His dance has something more raw, wild, socially engaged, like something to exorcise.

In 2022, Nawal brought with Abou the second edition of the **Premier(s) Pas** program, a springboard for women artists: dancers and choreographers. In this context, she sign in october 2022, **Sur tes épaules (On your shoulders)** for 7 female performers, which questions the advance of women's place in society.

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## 2022

- Choreographer - **Sur tes épaules** by Nawal Aït Benalla
- Choreographer - **Nuée** by Nawal Aït Benalla, for the dancers of the DNSP Dance Jazz Paris-Boulogne-Billancourt

## 2020

- Choreographer - **Premier(s) Pas** by Nawal Aït Benalla (volet 1) & by Abou Lagraa (volet 2)
- Choreographer - **Elsewhere** by Nawal Aït Benalla, for the dancers of the DNSP Dance Jazz Paris-Boulogne-Billancourt

## 2018

- Choreographic Assistant - **Wahada** by Abou Lagraa, for the 22 dancers of the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève

## 2017

- Dancer - **Wonderful One** by Abou Lagraa, world premiere at the Oriente/Occidente Festival, Rovereto, Italy
- Choreographic Assistant - **Bach Two Bach** by Abou Lagraa, for the young ballet of the CNSMD de Lyon

## 2015

- Choreographer & Dancer - **Do You Be** by Nawal Aït Benalla, diptych piece (solo/septuor)

## 2013

- Dancer - **El Djoudour** by Abou Lagraa, Opening of Marseille - Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture

## 2012

- Choreographic Assistant & Pedagogical Manager - **Univers... L'Afrique** by Abou Lagraa, for the Gémeaux Scène Nationale de Sceaux

## 2010

- Choreographic Assistant & Pedagogical Manager - **Nya** by Abou Lagraa, for the Ballet Contemporain d'Alger
- Dancer - **A World In Itself** by Abou Lagraa, with the Debussy Quartet

## 2009

- Choreographic assistant to Abou Lagraa for the closing ceremony of the **Festival Panafrican of Algiers**

## 2008

- Artistic Assistant - **Everyone's One** by Abou Lagraa for the Memphis Ballet (USA)
- Dancer - **D'Eux Sens** by Abou Lagraa

## 2007

- Artistic Assistant - **Nawal (or the Offering)** by Abou Lagraa, for the Mediterranean Centre for Contemporary Dance in Tunis
- Dancer - **Matri(K)is** by Abou Lagraa

## 2003

- Dancer - **Les Troyens**, directed by Yannis Kokkos, directed by John Eliot Gardiner at the Théâtre du Châtelet on the occasion of the composer's 200th anniversary, a highly acclaimed production that offers a revival to Berlioz's masterpiece
- Dancer - **Guillaume Tell**, Opera by Rossini, directed by Francesca Zambello, choreography by Blanca Li

## 2001

- Dancer & Actress - **Cyrano de Bergerac** by Jacques Weber

## 2000

- Dancer - DJ Laurent Garnier World Tour for **Unreasonable Behaviour**



**CIE LA BARAKA – LA CHAPELLE**  
ABOU & NAWAL LAGRAA