

NAWAL AÏT BENALLA

Choreographer & co-director of Compagnie La Baraka / La Chapelle

Born in Safi in Morocco in 1978, to a Berber father and a French mother, Nawal arrived in France at the age of 8. She begins classical dance (Vaganova technique), by chance, invited by a friend. This acts on her as a revealer. In the best dance school in Millau (Aveyron), where her parents settled, she decided at the age of 15 to continue her education by correspondence to devote herself fiercely to dance. She finds her way of being in the world, a way to anchor herself.

In 1997, Nawal chose to settle in Paris, where she discovered jazz and contemporary dance. She joined the Armstrong Jazz Ballet and worked with choreographers Matt Mattox, Georges Momboye & Wayne Barbaste.



In 2003, she met Peter Goss and intensively followed his contemporary dance and yoga classes. Precision, research and in-depth analysis of movement, the path that Nawal then takes takes him towards the question of transmission and research. In 2005, she obtained the State Diploma of Dance Teacher at the National Dance Center, Paris.

– VERSATILE ARTIST

Between 2000 and 2001, Nawal went on a world tour with DJ Laurent Garnier. She dances on the biggest international electronic music stages, from Berlin to Reykjavik, via Barcelona and “Les Eurockéennes de Belfort”. It’s an incredible experience for her to find herself in front of thousands of spectators.

In 2003, she was engaged in the ballet part of the opera “Guillaume Tell” at the Paris Opera, choreographed by Blanca Li, directed by Francesca Zamballo.

The same year, Nawal was chosen by Jacques Weber as a dancer and actress in “Cyrano de Bergerac” and “Les Troyens” by Yannis Kokkos (Grand Prix de la critique) at the Châtelet.

Still at the Théâtre du Châtelet, in 2004 and 2005, she frequented the world of musical comedy in “Le Chanteur de Mexico” with Rossy de Palma. At the same time, Nawal participates in numerous clips for Elie Chouraqui, Arielle Dombasle...

LA BARAKA COMPANY : A 180° TURN

– DANCER

In 2006, after a week-long audition, Nawal was selected from 750 candidates and joined the Compagnie la Baraka, created by the choreographer Abou Lagraa in 1997.

For the Lyon Dance Biennale in 2008, she performed the duo D'EUX SENS with the choreographer and went on tour for 4 years throughout Europe.

Nawal danced in more than 6 productions and became one of the company's leading figures. Her career as a dancer within Baraka takes her to the biggest national and international stages : Chaillot - National Dance Theater, Seattle, Moscow Territory Festival, National Theater of Algiers, Performing-Arts Washington.

Her qualities as a performer are praised in the Washington-Post "an artist from whom we cannot look away" (March 2009).

– CHOREOGRAPHIC ASSISTANT

Between 2006 and 2018, Nawal attended the Abou Lagraa choreography :

- "Nawal" (The offering) at the Mediterranean Dance Center Contemporaine de Tunis (2006), at Memphis Ballet USA (2007) ;
- Closing ceremony of the Pan-African Festival of Algiers (2009) ;
- "Nya" for the Contemporary Ballet of Algiers (2010) ;
- "Wahada" for the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève (2018).

– CO-DIRECTOR OF THE LA BARAKA & DE LA CHAPELLE COMPANY

In 2018, leading the project to establish the company within the Chapelle Sainte-Marie, Nawal became co-director of La Baraka / La Chapelle alongside Abou Lagraa.

This desecrated setting, a jewel of Baroque art, is transformed into a choreographic studio and houses the administrative offices of the company.

La Chapelle becomes a place for creative residencies welcoming French and international dance companies. Like a little "Villa Medici" for dance, in Ardèche.

– CHOREOGRAPHER

The year 2015 marks a turning point in Nawal's career. At 38, upon becoming a mother, she felt the desire to become a choreographer.

She created her first piece DO YOU BE, co-produced by the Maison de la Danse de Lyon, during the fortnight of gender equality.

In 2020, she created PREMIER(S) PAS for 8 dancers. This second play is critically acclaimed and continues to affirm an extraordinary ambition and professional trajectory.

His latest creation SUR TES EPAULES opens the Mainz International Dance Festival in Germany (2022) and the 23-24 season of the Théâtre Silvia Monfort, Paris (october 2023).

– TRANSMISSION AND COMMITMENT : DNA OF THE ARTIST

Passionate about transmission, Nawal gives numerous workshops in France and abroad and creates the educational center of the Baraka Company. Convinced that art and social commitment are inextricably linked, she initiated numerous projects :

Professionalization programs, combining training and creation :

- The "Mediterranean Cultural Bridge" (2010) - France/Algeria :

Program for 10 Algerian dancers, chosen from 400 candidates, thus creating the first Algerian Contemporary Ballet.

- "Women at the forefront" (2015) - France :

Nawal decides to reach out to young female talents from the Lyon region and offers a training and creation program for 7 dancers with atypical and restricted backgrounds.

- "First Step(s)" (since 2019) - France/Europe :

Nawal Aït Benalla & Abou Lagraa, accompanied by the Edmond de Rothschild Foundations, are developing the "Premier(s) Pas" program which offers 360° tailor-made support intended for professional dancers. The program offers training sessions, creation and tours. It goes further than a production and offers professional recognition, as well as personalized support in career structuring.

Educational and social programs :

Since 2018, at the Chapelle Sainte-Marie (Annonay), Nawal has been at the heart of an important work to raise awareness of dance through public rehearsals, attracting 5,000 spectators/year and aimed at the general public as well as at schools. Every year, more than 400 students benefit from dance workshops (from kindergarten to high school). At the same time, she continues her desire to reach out to the most vulnerable audiences, offering them workshops accessible free of charge, some examples :

- « **My body, my story** » for 40 children with disabilities in conjunction with the "L'Envol" Medical and Educational Institute;

- « **Come !** » for 7 young adults with multiple disabilities accompanied by their mothers, in connection with the GEM API Poly Handi ;

- « **Ovoimoja** » (Mahorais word meaning "together") for a group of Mahorais women who recently arrived in Annonay.