

## Movement in search of common ground

By India Stoughton

BEIRUT: When Igor Stravinsky's ballet "The Rite of Spring" was first staged in Paris in May 1913, the combination of Stravinsky's experimental music and fellow Russian exile Vaslav Nijinsky's daringly avant-garde choreography almost caused a riot in the audience.

Using intuitive movements, Nijinsky's dancers stripped away classical conventions to create a groundbreaking interpretation of a pagan tale, in which rituals celebrating the arrival of spring culminate in the sacrifice of a young girl, who dances herself to death.

German performance and installation artist Cornelia Krafft is revisiting Stravinsky's seminal work this month in a collaborative performance piece called "After 100 Springs." The work uses pagan symbols – like the unifying circle, light in the darkness and the four elements – to explore themes such as the interplay between generations, personal sacrifice for the greater good, the search for a common humanity and the need for a spark of hope amid the challenges arising in the wake of the Arab Spring.

"A lot of the themes I'm using in my work are very ancient," Krafft says. "Socrates said, 'There is nothing new under the sun' – and that was 2,000 years ago. So, if we look at the humanity in us, without being distracted by modern times, I think the needs stay the same. ... We will always talk about love or fear. We are turning around the same pot."

The performance's thematic complexity is reflected in Krafft's chosen title, which was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the first performance of "The Rite of Spring" last year.

"The title enforces that there is an after," she explains. "First of all it's a piece that is [dedicated] to sacrifice and living here. Khalas, no more human sacrifice. ... Now it's 2014, so the anniversary celebration is over, but the 'after' also [implies a question]: Can we push ourselves beyond the cruelty and the pain and the consistency of evil and war?"

Krafft, who has lived in Beirut for more than four years, works as an assistant professor in the fine arts and art history department of the American University of Beirut and says the performers in "After 100 Springs" are mostly students or alumni. Although the performance is set to a recording of Stravinsky's score, Krafft stresses that it's not a dance piece.

"It's very simple," she says. "It's mute movements, and they're actually movements anyone could do – aside from a few people who have extraordinary talents because of their hobbies. This was not meant to be a dance performance. It's the [simplification] of dance, actually – what Nijinsky did 100 years ago in his choreography. It's about the movement that you can do as a rooted human being."

The performance is divided into 15 movements, between 20 seconds and five minutes apiece. Their titles – “Adoration of the Earth,” “Dances of the Young Girls,” “Ritual of the Rival Tribes” and “Glorification of the Chosen One” – correspond to Stravinsky’s own.

“I followed his titles, interpreting a landscape of our own” Krafft says. “Who are the young girls? What are they doing? What’s our ritual? Who are our ancestors? It’s very tightly condensed. Stravinsky’s composition is 34 minutes, so we worked on a three-minute [section] for two weeks, just to digest how you move with the music.”

She also emphasizes that the performance is a collaboration.

“It’s about what these young people feel,” she says. “Collective for me means their stories, their ideas, their bodies, their capabilities and also their opinions about what I’m doing. ... I’m not trying to make them execute what I’m thinking. ... I’m just pulling the strings together.”

The performers are given a chance to express their individual views in the program, and each has penned a short reflection on the nature of sacrifice.

The performance is free but audience members are encouraged to make a donation in support of Unite Lebanon Youth Project, an NGO founded in 2010 to provide access to education and recreational programs for underprivileged children and young adults in Lebanon.

“I searched for NGOs that work with children from underprivileged backgrounds,” Krafft explains, “because I thought with this emerging ... lost young generation from Syria and other regions this is really the most important thing we have to think about here. ... I think all we can do now is to give them an education so they don’t end up being exploited.”

She chose to support ULYP, she explains, because their programs not only help those they educate directly but encourage young people to remain rooted in their own communities, which also benefit from the knowledge, values and skills acquired by each student.

“It’s important that we’re performing for this NGO,” Krafft stresses. “Last year we performed for KAFA, and we had 1200 people in the audience and we only made \$400. This year I’m going to be really on the offensive, because it’s ridiculous ... it’s not even a dollar a person.”

It’s an attitude that’s in keeping with the theme of the performance, which revolves around personal sacrifice as a means of achieving communal harmony, symbolized by the overlap between two circles.

“It’s about ... human beings across the globe,” Krafft explains. “You can’t zoom in any more today and say: ‘My region is fine.’ I think we’re beyond that. ... You cannot pretend you’re not part of the whole.”

“After 100 Springs” will be on show at Hamra’s Masrah al-Madina Feb. 10 and 11. To reserve, please send an email to: [after100springs@gmail.com](mailto:after100springs@gmail.com).