



SHEILA METZNER

VISIONS OF EDEN VOICES OF BABEL

Maguy Marin, France's femme terrible of dance, prepares two American premieres—ritualized, self-contained worlds—for the Next Wave Festival.

By TONI BENTLEY



WHEN THE CURTAIN IS RAISED on Maguy Marin's "Babel, Babel" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in October, naked men and women will walk, run, embrace and frolic on a huge grass field — the park of Babel.

The company's most popular piece began, says Ms. Marin, France's 36-year-old femme terrible of dance theater, because "I wanted to work on voices, live voices." And indeed the dancers yell, grunt and babble (as in the biblical version), sometimes in discernable French but more often in a rhythmical banter so unified it serves as the musi-

cal pulse of the movement.

The spectacle, which one hesitates to call a dance, was the first in which Ms. Marin used nudity.

"There were some problems," she says. "There always are when you ask people to go further. Not everyone will do things like that. I asked the dancers to be naked, but I couldn't oblige anyone to. 'Tell me,' I said. They said yes. But then, after we had already begun rehearsing, three left."

Rehearsals were naked. "They had to be, because the body is different in tights. You don't think of the problems of spreading the legs." Ms. Marin shows how the movements had to be discreet, sculpted — in profile with rounded shoulders and limited leg movement.

In the central scene, the dancers reappear clothed, carrying tents,

Toni Bentley, a former dancer with the New York City Ballet, is the author of "Winter Season, A Dancer's Journal."

swimsuits, towels, food and babies, and they embark on a wild camping trip ("Everyone was camping in the 60's," says Ms. Marin). The episode mimics the pettiness and pride of man. In the midst of marital fights and sexual games, a glamorous rock star in stiletto heels, a full-skirted red dress and a monumental mound of blond hair sings popular songs in Arabic, Spanish and French. She strips to black studded leather, black stockings and a punk mohawk haircut. The singer is Maguy Marin.

"When I was little, I loved to sing," says the choreographer. "And when I was 12 I started singing with a rock group. After two years I realized that dance was more important." But now she has found a way to combine her talents. Ms. Marin will sing again this fall, in the Brecht-Weill "Seven Deadly Sins" that she will stage for her company working with the Lyons Opera Ballet. Her version of Prokofiev's "Cendrillon," commissioned by

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SEASON PREVIEW

Collaborations and Experiments

By JACK ANDERSON

The new dance season promises some extravagant theatrical visions, many of them collaborations of choreographers, artists and composers. At a gala for the **Martha Graham Dance Company** (Oct. 6 at City Center), **Mikhail Baryshnikov** and **Rudolf Nureyev** are to appear together in "Appalachian Spring" and Ms. Graham will offer the premiere of a new work set to Stravinsky's "Symphony in C."

The **Trisha Brown Company** (City Center, Sept. 14-20) offers a new work by Ms. Brown designed by the artist **Donald Judd**. This autumn's **Next Wave Festival** at the Brooklyn Academy of Music features experimental choreography by **Maguy Marin**, **Nina Wiener**, **Karole Armitage** and **Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker**. Most of their productions are designed by artists and have commissioned scores, and in subject matter they range from an ode to love for a troupe of dancers and 50 chairs to evocations of biblical scenes.

The **Next Wave** is not the season's only big festival. The **New York City Ballet** promises a spring **American Music Festival** of 30 ballets, all danced to scores by American composers.

For the **Joffrey Ballet**, **Millicent Hodson**, a dance historian, is reconstructing Nijinsky's controversial choreography of 1913 for Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps." It will premiere in Los Angeles on Sept. 30 and in New York on Oct. 28. The company will also revive **Gerald Arpino's** multimedia apocalyptic fantasy, "The Clowns," and offer a lavish new "Nutcracker" for the holidays, set in 19th-century America.



MAXINE SHERMAN
Martha Graham Company
City Center, Oct. 6-25

Although some companies complain of economic hardship, new troupes continue to be formed. Those performing here include **Edward Villella's Miami City Ballet** and the **Ballet du Nord** of Roubaix, France. Other companies are visiting from China, Yugoslavia, Finland and Jamaica, as well as San Francisco, Akron and Atlanta.

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Maguy Marin, left, working with Françoise Leick, one of the 12 dancers in her company.

MAGUY MARIN

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the Lyons company, was performed in New York last January and again in May. Anna Kisselgoff, a dance critic for The New York Times, called it an "astonishingly original and magical production" and described Ms. Marin as "an innovative artist of the first rank."

The enormous studio in Créteil, a suburb of Paris, that is the home of the Compagnie Maguy Marin is littered with eclectic props from its various works: psychedelic, polka-dotted high heels, plastic laundry baskets, wigs of mangled hair, bizarre musical instruments, belts strung with baby dolls. The 12 dancers, in the usual torn, mismatched layers of rehearsal attire, are running through "Calambre," Ms. Marin's 1985 dance that distorts, exaggerates and honors flamenco. They wear black leather boots that make the studio resound with the loud, synchronized stomps of Spanish dancing.

All eyes focus on the smallest dancer, the company's di-

rector and sole choreographer. Wearing a huge Duke University sweatshirt tucked into her sweat pants, she demonstrates the aerial accent of a backward somersault onto one shoulder, legs extended straight upward. She stuffs a piece of gum into her mouth, then lights a cigarette. Fine-featured, dark and without makeup, Maguy Marin is graceful, forthright, authoritative and sexy.

Born in France to Spanish emigrant parents, Ms. Marin began ballet training at the age of 8 at the Toulouse Conservatory and pursued a strictly classical ballet career for the next 10 years. She then studied for 3 years at Maurice Béjart's school, Mudra, before joining his company. Robert Denvers, then assistant artistic director of Béjart, remembers her as "very classical, the most classical — beautiful legs, feet, everything." Even now Ms. Marin walks with the unmistakable classical dancer's turnout, and in rehearsal

there are glimpses of elegant arched feet and a smooth classical line of the body and legs.

It is an interesting footnote to her career that she is not a choreographer who is "modern" because she could not be classical; she chose to explore different forms of movement. Nor does her work abuse her knowledge of classical tradition with mockery or gimmick. Though her dancers take a classical ballet class every morning, in the pieces they perform there is hardly a ballet reference to be found.

"I was a good dancer — but little," says Ms. Marin. "With the classic dance . . . I did it for 15 years, and it went as far as it was going to go. I found I was more interested in doing things on other bodies. I prefer to do for others, not for me."

In 1978 she formed her own company with another Béjart dancer, Daniel Ambash, who is the father of her 5-year-old son. "Béjart was theatrical, but he was too selective," says Ms. Marin. "His style was modern, but modern reacting as classical. He was attracted by classical dancers — long necks, long legs, thin, no tits, no asses, no bellies. The world is not like that. Sometimes you

need big girls. Sometimes we need what is also not 'beautiful.'"

But this allusion to realism is misleading. Ms. Marin's works, most of which are full-length spectacles without intermission, present ritualized, self-contained worlds where props, scenery, masks, music, voices and movement combine into fantastical, bizarre adventures.

Apparently tearing sections of skin off her arms, stomach, thighs and face, Ms. Marin demonstrates a scene from her 1984 work entitled "Hymen." "This is me, and this is me and this is me and this too is me!" she cries.

"This character is woman with a big 'W.' She wears a huge hat and is wrapped in an enormous length of white material, like a Japanese princess. She starts unwinding until she is naked. The image I wanted was of a striptease — not vulgar, but a real striptease. But I wanted more, I wanted to go further." In performance the dancer wears skinlike latex pieces on her body that when torn reveal red; the color suggests lost virginity, violence and our deeper layers. The metaphor is clear, powerful, fearless and mod-

ern. It is one of many in the works of this serious, original artist.

Like "Babel, Babel," "Eden" (the other Maguy Marin work to be performed at the Next Wave Festival after a run at the Los Angeles Festival in September) employs a biblical image of nakedness. Like all her pieces, it began as a purely technical exercise.

"I wanted to experiment on couples, duets," says Ms. Marin. "Because I wanted duets, love came into it — of course. I thought about love, the first big love — Adam and Eve. And that gave me the idea for the rest of the ballet."

Many of Ms. Marin's works are derived from biblical references. "The Bible is the Big Book. It is all of humanity — brothers, sisters, everything — all that is love." She is reticent to name other influences on her work. "What I like are movies [Woody Allen, Bergman, Kurosawa], paintings, books about human adventure [Artaud, Beckett, García Lorca], where there is something behind, spiritual things suggested through technique. I like what is not said."

"The first duet in 'Eden' took a long time to make," says Ms. (Continued on Page 56)

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Marin. "Now I think it's the best thing in the piece. I wanted the dancers to find the sensation with the breath; the girl has to travel in the body of the boy. There was no choreography then, no steps. I just said, 'Find your bodies together.'"

"In 'Babel, Babel' I wanted the dancers really naked, but in 'Eden' I didn't," says Ms. Marin. "I thought of a second skin, no seams. With this I could use all the leg movements." Montserrat Casanova, who has designed the costumes for most of Maguy Marin's pieces, devised a single smooth covering from the fingers and toes up to the chin, with built-in bosoms and indicated genitals. To enhance the surreal nature of the bodies, masks were also used. They are ghostly, expressionless faces evocative of Hieronymus Bosch.

A TELLING AND IMPORTANT feature of Ms. Marin's work is the use of masks, distorted, exaggerated makeup, wigs and even clay faces (in "May B," a piece inspired by the writings of Samuel Beckett). In "Eden" one is reminded of the bloodless symbolic faces of Kabuki actors and also of the "über-marionette" imagined by Edward Gordon Craig, the great theater designer and lover of Isadora Duncan. Craig wrote: "The über-marionette will not compete with life — rather it will go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance — it will aim to clothe itself with a deathlike beauty while exhaling a living spirit."

Says Ms. Marin, "In 'Eden' I wanted to work like a painter seeing humanity. Dancers are very narcissistic. I discovered after using the masks that the dancers are in service to the dance. The dancer is no longer concerned with the question 'How do I dance?'"

Ms. Marin talks of the difficulties she encountered working with classical ballet companies that support hierarchical systems, encouraging a self-concern that can limit a dancer's willingness to experiment. Of the "Cendrillon" she choreographed in 1985 for the Lyons Opera Ballet she says: "I had a lot of problems because of the masks, the costumes [many of which used unflattering padding] and the sets [which limited the dancing space]. Françoise Joulie was in the corps, but I chose her for Cin-

derella. She works very hard, she was fantastic, but she didn't have a little snub nose or great feet, and one shoulder is a little higher than the other. But she is very clever. Of course now she is a principal dancer."

Of choreographing "Leçons de Ténèbres" for the Paris Opera Ballet last spring: "The dancers were sensitive to what I was doing," though the bureaucracy was oppressive. "If you want a box of matches, you can't have it. There are no responsible people. They all say, 'It's not my job.' So I prefer to work with my company."

Ms. Marin is proud of her dancers. "They are not careerists. Of course they want to be good artists, professionals. They want quality, but it's not about being a star. It can be difficult when they begin. They have to change, leave the ego and vanity behind. There is a lot of respect between us. But they are not equal, each has something different — one is an actress, one works better on the floor, one lifts the legs better. If one has a solo, it is because that one is better for that solo, not because that one is a star. Everyone can be in the chorus. I choose good workers with good intentions."

"I don't want a bigger company," says Ms. Marin. "If you have a lot of dancers, you lose the relationship. With 12 you can talk, speak," al-

though she is emphatic that she doesn't like to give them verbal notes. "I don't like to give the spirit with words. It comes through the technique. When it's right, you see it very clearly, when it's wrong, it's more difficult; sometimes it just needs more work to become beautiful."

Though she acknowledges that her ambition and talent have taken their toll on her personal life, Ms. Marin thinks that "success is for something, maybe to be able to choose." She has so many offers now that she can make choices. "I want to have more children, it's a very big part of my life. Maybe I didn't realize the time a private life takes."

A beautiful little boy has been at the rehearsal since its beginning, three and a half hours ago. He has lost his trousers and now sports a floor-length apron — a costume — and enormous ballet shoes. He walks into the center of a discussion about somersaults, takes Ms. Marin's hand and says, "Maman?" His mother slings him over one hip, answers his question and proceeds with the rehearsal.

One remembers something else she said about "Eden": "Love is like the breath of the world. The rest is war." It is a key to all of her work — bold images of destructive, evil energies, spaces of beauty and peace in between. ■

A SELECTIVE GUIDE: DANCE

By Jack Anderson

September

Trisha Brown Company. American premiere of "Newark," with choreography by Ms. Brown, visual presentation and sound concept by Donald Judd. Sept. 14-20, City Center, 246-8989.

Feld Ballet. Premieres by Eliot Feld include "Embraced Waltzes" to music by Chopin and a pas de deux to Haydn. Sept. 29-Nov. 1, Joyce Theater, 242-0800.

October

Dancing for Life. A benefit to support AIDS care and research, featuring American Ballet Theater, Dance Theater of Harlem, New York City Ballet and the companies of Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, Martha Graham, Robert Joffrey, Lar Lubovitch,

Mark Morris, Paul Taylor and Twyla Tharp. Oct. 5, New York State Theater, 477-2166.

Martha Graham Dance Company. Season includes gala, Oct. 6, at which Maya Plisetskaya dances Ruth St. Denis's "Incense" and Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolf Nureyev are scheduled to appear in "Appalachian Spring"; also a new work (Oct. 13) to Stravinsky's Symphony in C. Oct. 6-25, City Center, 246-8989.

Ballet du Nord. New French troupe from Roubaix in ballets by George Balanchine, John Clifford, Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, Lar Lubovitch and the company's director, Alfonso Cata, a former New York City Ballet dancer. Oct. 17-18, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, 718 434-2222.

Maguy Marin Company. Controversial French choreographer offers a study of social decline inspired by the Tower of Babel, and a look at

Jack Anderson is a dance critic for The New York Times.

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