

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Distant duet

Internet links dancers in two different venues in La Mue de l'Ange

When Isabelle Choinière was a science student, she asked questions that stumped her teachers. They told her she should study philosophy.

So she became a cyber dancer, a multimedia pioneer who uses inquisition and Internet technology to enhance performance.

"I have questions, ideas and philosophical preoccupations," the stocky little blonde said earlier this week from Théâtre Prospero where she was finishing her new show, La Mue de

l'Ange, for her multimedia company, Le Corps Indice.

Her probing led to her first electronic performance piece, *Communism*, which was shown at techno festivals in 10 countries on three continents. In it, she walked across



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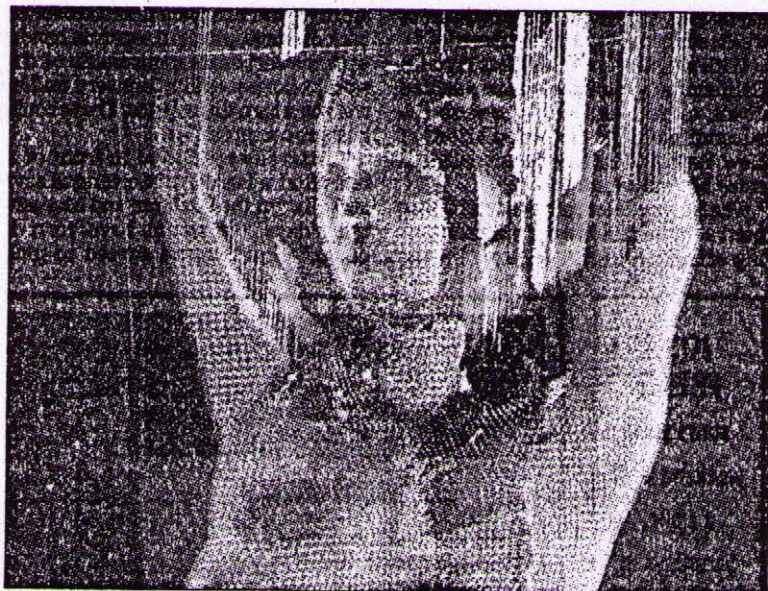
boundaries between past and future, exploring limitations of real and virtual, skin and soul. Her newest work intends to storm barricades between physical and psychic limits of the natural and the synthetic body via - what else? - Internet hookups.

"With the Internet, it's impossible to have a sense of the whole when you navigate. You'll never be secure. The composition is infinite," she says with great satisfaction.

Choinière tastes ideas with the same kind of enjoyment that other people eat ice cream. She constantly questions the unknown, her mind open to new routes and methods. She talks about transformation, of thrilling cyber discoveries that "bring me to directions I never dreamed of."

Current collaborator Thierry Fournier, a computer programmer she met during a residency in Paris, offered her new challenges for La Mue de l'Ange by developing programs to enhance and project interactive sounds made by her body and that of her partner Angela di Lauro.

The performance takes place in two



Isabelle Choinière says her work La Mue de l'Ange is about the body in a technological world.

venues several blocks from each other but they could just as easily be half a world apart. Choinière and di Lauro are wired with electronic sensors which generate continuous signals that, processed through the Internet, allow the dancers to communicate with each other. The resulting corporal and technical dialogue throbs with sound and image.

Choinière performs in a special environment created at the theatre, a place where the real and the virtual merge. Unenhanced by visuals, di Lauro dances in a loft, in a part of the piece which is still a work-in-progress.

The choreographer says it's hard to separate the real from the unreal because the body is experienced as an open system where nothing prevents either matter or space from going beyond its limits.

"That's the point," says the artistic director of Le Corps Indice. "It focuses on the body - how the body senses and

how it changes. It's poetic and ritualistic. Of course, there's technology, but this piece is about the body and how the human is in our world - our world that is technology."

La Mue de l'Ange (The Angel's Mutation) is about communication on all levels - through flesh, mind, time, space and sound. The hybrid perfor-

mance is concerned with molting, the shedding of the skin. As for l'Ange, "Angel is the ancient's concept of the virtual, a body that is there but can't be seen and doesn't eat. The imagination is

the first virtual."

A new friend met on a tour in Brazil and their subsequent correspondence by E-mail led to La Mue de l'Ange. Choinière marvels that her friend's words persuaded her to take a trip to Salvadore de Bahia to experience a Brazilian Carnival. That trip sparked an examination of relationships, how they're made and how technology can

change them.

"When we exchanged E-mail, I could feel her energy coming right into my room. I could sense the energy of Bahia in her words."

Choinière spent a month in Brazil marveling at people's behaviour at Carnival, the high point of the year.

"They start preparing in November and by February nobody works. Nobody in government. Nobody at banks. Nobody." The celebrations went far beyond her imagination. "You feel like a mass of flesh. It really marked me."

Her early attempts to work on La Mue de l'Ange didn't go far because her original collaborators were unable to develop the necessary programming. That's when Choinière persuaded sound architect Fournier to join her new team, which included lighting technologist François Roupinian, costume designer Cheryl I. Catterall and video techie Jimmy Lakatos.

Instead of the six months originally allotted to do the show, it has taken two years of dedication. Sometimes the group worked 15 hours a day.

By nature, multimedia productions are more expensive than most theatre, music or dance shows. This project called for expensive equipment. Just one of l'Ange's sophisticated gadgets cost \$60,000-\$80,000. Theatre rentals cost another \$15,000, a necessity because the various media used in the piece could not have been integrated and rehearsed in a normal studio.

Choinière says she still has work to do to finish the loft part of the show where spectators will watch di Lauro for free.

"I wanted this environment to be much more Zen. More intuitive. People will hear us and the music but there will be no image."

♦ Isabelle Choinière performs La Mue de l'Ange at Théâtre Prospero, 1371 Ontario St. E., at 8:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$15. Call (514) 526-6582. At the same time, Angela di Lauro performs free at the Société des Arts Technologiques, Suite 610, 307 Ste. Catherine St. W. Choinière shares her techno secrets in a workshop at SAT on Oct. 23 between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Cost is \$15. Call (514) 844-2033.