

# Weekend

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From left, Françoise Joullé in the title role, Anne-Sylvie Gaches as the Fairy and Stéphane Vessier as the Prince in the Lyons Opera Ballet production of "Cinderella," at the City Center.

## Maguy Marin's Doll's-Eye View Of 'Cinderella'

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

**I**N the dance boom that has burst over France in the 1980's, there is one choreographer who stands apart. Most would say that Maguy Marin does so because of her fiercely original talent, especially in the theatrical approach she takes toward modern dance.

A case in point is her dazzling doll's-eye vision of "Cinderella," created as a guest commission for the Lyons Opera Ballet and on view through Sunday afternoon at the City Center. It may not fit everyone's conception of a ballet — despite an occasional use of toe shoes — but then Miss Marin hardly comes up with what anyone else does. Like Pina Bausch in West Germany, albeit from a different perspective, she places her own work under the label of "dance theater."

"Cinderella" is typical of her method: Spectacular stagecraft (the live dolls are stashed initially on three giant shelves) goes hand in glove with the dancers' unconventional movements and the choreographer's attitude toward life.

In another piece in her repertory, "Babel, Babel," she has used Mahler's music to evoke a paradise that civilization corrupts — civilization as hilariously embodied in a French vacation campground. With her own

modern-dance company in France, Miss Marin appears in that scene as the singer belting out rock songs of the 60's. Last year at the City Center, the same company performed "May B," her austere but totally apt synthesis of Samuel Beckett's themes of optimism-within-pessimism.

"One of my preoccupations is that I have a rather pessimistic outlook, but I believe you can work toward happiness," the 35-year-old choreographer said in a recent interview in New York.

"The theme of 'Cinderella' has to do with something that bothers me a lot," she added. "Why is Cinderella obliged to become a princess to be happy? It's love that is most important. There is a social resonance in these fairy tales — suggesting that if you are poor, you can't be happy. The wealthy prince signifies happiness. I made the prince in my production pure too, and surrounded by bad people like Cinderella. He's not responsible for his money. I took him out of his context."

And so Cinderella and the little prince-doll with a crown of flashing lights, who perches sometimes on a highchair throne, are united through true love and tenderness expressed poignantly through the choreography. Miss Marin suggests that despite

stock notions, happiness can be found.

Her babydoll prince is in blue — even his hair is blue — and Cinderella is in pink. "It's always like that," the choreographer says, sighing. "It's never yellow or green for babies. And the usual ending for these fairy tales is 'They lived happily ever after and had many children.'" That is exactly what Miss Marin provides as a witty twist, when her live doll couple pull a row of 20 real dolls on wheels at the close.

Born in Toulouse, France, of Spanish emigrant parents who supported the Republican cause during Spain's Civil War, Miss Marin began studying ballet at the age of 8 at the Toulouse Conservatory. At 16, after winning the top Conservatory prize, she studied in Paris for a year with the ballerina Nina Vyroubova, joined the Strasbourg Ballet — dancing in the corps of "Swan Lake" and "Giselle" — and then decided she needed something more "creative." Maurice Béjart, the director of the Ballet of the 20th Century, had recently opened his school, Mudras, in Brussels, and Miss Marin enrolled there. From 1974 to 1977 she danced with Mr. Béjart's company.

With her husband, Daniel Ambash — a Béjart colleague — she formed her first company in 1978 and called it the Theater of the Ark, "because we were two, one of each species." This was the company that proved a revelation when the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., invited five French troupes in 1983, two years after the French Government named Miss Marin as resident choreographer in a subsidized House of Culture in the Paris suburb of Créteil.

Miss Marin differs from the many other experimental French choreographers who cropped up in the last decade. She is neither self-taught nor a disciple of Merce Cunningham, whose influence was very strong in France in the 1970's.

"Because I was touring with Béjart then, I was not in France when modern dance came there," Miss Marin says. "I discovered the Americans after the others," meaning that her work does not lean toward the formal abstractions prevalent at one time among her colleagues nor does it use the idioms developed by Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais. Nor does she feel the need to throw off "the big American influence" as a result of a current "complex of the French with respect toward the Americans," she says.

Her own impulse has been different. "I am very Spanish," she says. And while she uses an eclectic range of movement totally unlike the Béjart troupe's, she absorbed the bias toward theatricality at the Mudras school. Some French critics have remarked that the present return to dramatic expression in France is a result of Pina Bausch's impact. Yet there is no doubt that Miss Marin and Miss Bausch produce very different works as "dance theater."

"To me," Miss Marin says, "Pina Bausch's dance theater is fixed in a moment in time. Her performers are dressed in clothes from the 1950's. There is a great deal of everyday detail, but these are recollections. It's a memory, but it does not project into the year 2000."

"I like this nostalgia, but I need to open the door, to see what is further



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The French choreographer Maguy Marin.

down the road."

When the Lyons Opera Ballet asked her to choreograph a work to Prokofiev's well-known "Cinderella" score, Miss Marin knew that although she would be working with classically trained dancers, she would not be tempted to create a conventional version. Her point of departure was to research the sources of the story that appeared first in the collection of Grimm's fairy tales and then Charles Perrault's better-known versions.

"I found that 'Cinderella' is a Chinese story from the Middle Ages, and there is a Tibetan version from which Perrault took out the cruelty," she says. "Grimm kept some of the violence. In the Tibetan version, Cinderella killed her mother, who comes back as a white cow to protect her." "I read all this and did 'nothing' with this — because I didn't want to become involved in a psychoanalytic story," Miss Marin says.

In Miss Marin's view, the fairy godmother is really Cinderella's late mother, who has returned to protect her in a new incarnation.

Because she was working with ballet dancers but did not find classical technique suited to her ideas, Miss Marin decided to have the dancers dressed as masked dolls to keep them away from ballet conventions.

There were other reasons, she adds. "I could have done something sugary. But I decided to do 'Cinderella' with leftover broken dolls. In adults, the memory of childhood is very erased. The dolls' faces here are partly erased, they are unclear."

The production reflects the ambiguity many people feel about their childhood. "It was very nice to be a child, but at the same time I was scared of many things," Miss Marin says. "So the dolls here are not all very nice dolls."

Miss Marin suggests that all her pieces are self-contained, creating a universe of their own: "If there is one thing in common it is the idea that there is no outside. When you go onstage, I feel it's like a ritual. The moment you put your feet onstage, that is an important moment."

"Cinderella" will be performed at the City Center, 131 West 55th Street, tonight and tomorrow at 8 P.M., with matinees tomorrow at 2 and Sunday at 3. Tickets are \$10, \$20 and \$30. Box office: 246-8989.