

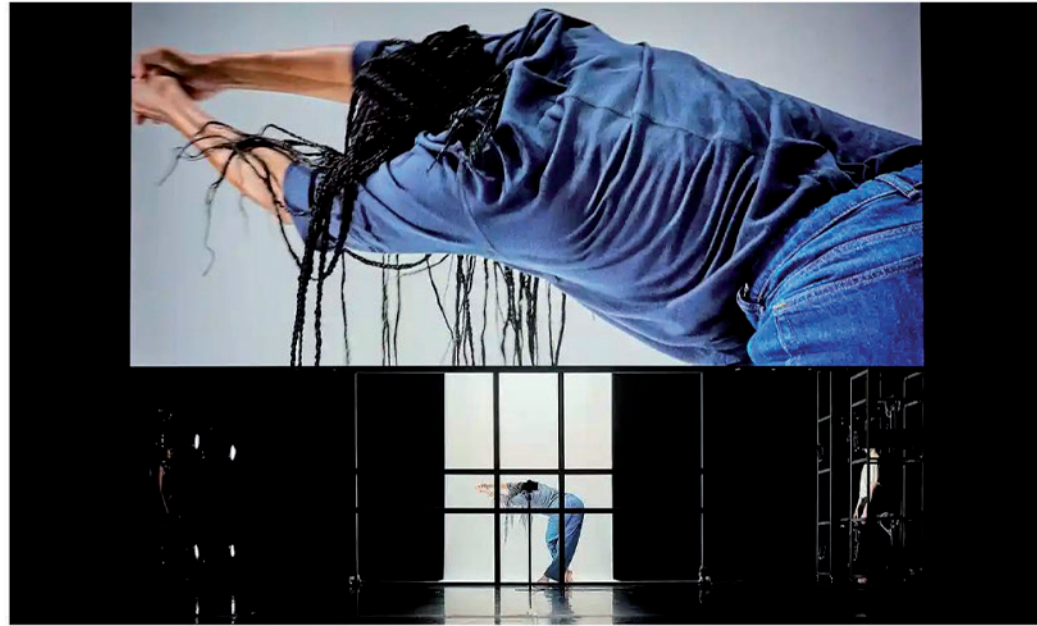


Close Up review - zoom in on a sporty dance of cool control

★★★★☆

Opéra Grand, Avignon

Noé Soulier's new piece has six dancers, five musicians and one fixed camera which picks out details from individual and entwined figures



The movement is more a cleansing expulsion of emotion ... Nangaline Gomis in Close Up. Photograph: Christophe Raynaud de Lage



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For his new creation, French choreographer Noé Soulier says that he drew upon action verbs: hit, throw, dodge. If that suggests the sporting arena rather than an opera house, where Close Up has its Avignon festival premiere, well the results sometimes resemble a warmup for the Paris Olympics. There are sequences that evoke martial arts, climbing, even a bit of discus.

A contrapuntal Bach accompaniment, including the Art of Fugue, is played on violin, viola da gamba, harpsichord, traverso and cello by the [Il Convito ensemble](#). Soulier's choreography has the balance more in favour of the six young dancers' spirit of independent discovery than in the relationship developing between them. Searching expressions are worn as they conjure up encounters with unknown terrain, then switch to scrutinising their bodies as if they, too, are seen for the first time.

The defining verb here might be "release" as the performers shake it out. Gestures are delivered with the snap of fresh laundry, often accompanied by breathy swishes, and the movement is framed as an expulsion of emotion. A striking encounter between the musical and physical ensembles comes when the dancers end one sequence, panting, and turn to face the quintet awaiting their next move. But it is a too-rare coup of interconnection in choreography that could do with greater tonal range.

After the freely roaming opening, a fixed camera controls the audience's gaze. Individual and then entwined figures, often caught in extreme closeup, are projected on a huge screen with the dancer shown beneath, behind a geometric grid that isolates sections of the body.

But the live feed brings diminishing returns for a piece that is styled like a Gap advert with its palette of denims and whites. A final sequence, using the full depth of the stage, does not crown the evening as it could. But the dancers, especially Nangaline Gomis and Julie Charbonnier, deliver this work of often cool control with verve.

● At [Opéra Grand, Avignon](#), until 20 July. Then touring until 27 March