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MUSICARTSCIENCELITERATURE

The Dance Alloy and Compagnie Hervé-Gil

By Scott Timm

This spring Dance Alloy joins the New Europe Arts Festival with a program of dances May 21 and 22 at The Fulton Theater. Like the backgrounds of the choreographers represented on the program, the three works present three strikingly different viewpoints. The first, an American premiere by French choreographer Myriam Hervé-Gil, offers a European perspective on contemporary dance. The second is a world premiere by New York-based Doug Elkins, offering a look at cutting-edge choreography on this side of the Atlantic. The program is rounded out with a new work for Dance Alloy dancers, choreographed by Hervé-Gil. The three works together reveal much about the state of the art, in America and abroad.

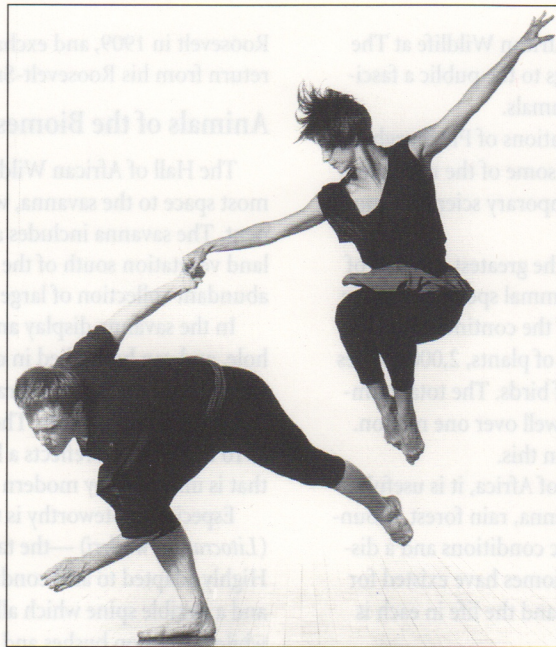
Myriam Hervé-Gil's latest work, *Trente Atlantique*, will be performed by her Paris-based company, La Compagnie Hervé-Gil. Deborah Jowitt writes of Myriam Hervé-Gil in the *Village Voice*, "Her choreographic gifts and her wit are particularly vivid. . . . But dancing, excellently devised and structured, is what powers her dramas."

And dramas they are. As much theater as dance, her works can evoke the atmosphere of a shabby, genteel social club (in the 1991 *Baldwin Club*), or a Spanish café where music plays loudly and men and women stalk one another as if in a bullring (*El Moliendo Café*, 1990). *Trente Atlantique* is set in the 1930s on an ocean liner in the Atlantic, and evokes the stylish sophistication of the transatlantic set. Hervé-Gil has developed a powerful and touching artistic language that crosses national borders, and this visit will bring her strong voice to Pittsburgh audiences for the first time.

The eight-year-old dance troupe is no stranger to American shores. Previous appearances at prestigious American dance venues, such as Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Massachusetts, and Durham, North Carolina's American Dance Festival, have earned accolades from audiences and critics alike. The company's appearance in Pittsburgh marks the beginning of its third American tour, during which it will travel to several American cities, among them Lee, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia.

While Hervé-Gil works within the French system of strong federal funding for the arts that allows her to create large-scale theatrical works, choreographer Doug Elkins survives by creating work on a smaller scale. Instead of grandly theatrical productions, he concentrates instead on great physical daring and hip virtuosity, with a finely honed sense of parody and humor that overlays the purely physical aspects of his work. His small company has been garnering praise among the audiences of New York's "downtown dance scene," and Elkins has acquired a reputation as the dance world's *enfant terrible*.

Instead of relying on a traditional movement vocabulary (such as classical ballet or classic modern dance forms like the Graham tech-



Lois Greenfield

The Dance Alloy will perform a work prepared by French choreographer Hervé-Gil

nique), Elkins creates dances that draw from contemporary street dance, the exotic and energetic rhythms of the Brazilian *capoeira*, and even the martial arts. He fuses these various elements into continuous phrases of movement that rapidly and constantly shift from one energy level to another. The trio he has created for Dance Alloy dancers pushes them to increase an already expansive movement vocabulary.

To avoid a simplistic contrast between "European" dance and "American" dance, Dance Alloy Artistic Director Mark Taylor has asked Myriam Hervé-Gil to make a new work for Dance Alloy dancers, a piece to bridge two cultures. Hervé-Gil's work often examines the constantly shifting balance between tragedy and comedy, particularly as manifested in the absurdities of daily life. This new quartet is based on these typical interchanges, as observed in two couples at a social dance. She draws her inspiration from the *bal musette*, a provincial social dance form popular in France during the 1930s and 40s. The music that accompanied the *bal musette* was most often played on the accordion, and the score for the work will be drawn from period recordings.

The New Europe Arts Festival is just one aspect of The Emerging International City program, designed to strengthen Pittsburgh's international stature and competitiveness. William Lafe, executive director of The Emerging International City, notes that this festival marks the first time in Pittsburgh's history that local and regional arts groups have joined forces to participate in a multi-faceted international cultural event. In addition to Dance Alloy, other organizations participating include the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, the Society for Contemporary Crafts, the Pittsburgh Jazz Society, and City Theater, among others. (For information on the complete schedule of events, call the New Europe Arts Festival at 391-7525.)

It is instructive for us to draw in and examine the wealth of artistic expression from around the globe as we prepare ourselves to expand in the international arena. When Andrew Carnegie opened Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh was emerging as a national city; one that would build the rest of America. Almost a century later, Pittsburgh prepares to expand its international role, offering products and services to the world community. It is exciting to see art, in all its expression and form, as a principal commodity in this new market.

Performances by Dance Alloy and Compagnie Hervé-Gil are Friday and Saturday, May 21 and 22, at the Fulton Theater. Both performances begin at 8:00 p.m. For more information, telephone Dance Alloy at 621-6670. ■

Scott Timm, Dance Alloy's assistant managing director, is a freelance writer and editor whose work is primarily in the arts.