

Our own groove: let's start breathing

Laura Ceberio Ginestar, 16/11/2024

How does the moment in complete darkness, just before a performance starts, make you feel as a spectator? How long can you experience this darkness in a theatre room? When you are sitting next to the person who accompanied you to the theatre, or perhaps a stranger, can you hear their breathing? Their coughing? The sounds they make with their mouth? Can you hear your own breath, maybe even your heartbeat?

We assume this moment in the darkness as a mere signal for the performance to begin, having internalised its usual duration as typically less than a minute. But what happens when this moment stretches longer?

G r o o v e, created and performed by French-Malagasy choreographer Soa Ratsifandrihana, began with approximately 10 minutes of absolute darkness. This prolonged moment, which I felt like an eternity, became somehow a test of waiting. Yet, this waiting gave rise to a multitude of sensory stimuli hovering over the theatre space. The stage was set in the round, with three rows of audience seating on each side. I could feel both my own discomfort and that of the people sitting in front of and next to me: squirming in their seats, breathing and coughing nervously.

This moment of darkness, which usually precedes a performance, was already part of Ratsifandrihana's piece, in which she explores her own groove through dance. The term 'groove' refers to the term from jazz music, where finding the rhythm, the flow, is crucial when playing. Thus, in this piece, Ratsifandrihana embarks on a search for her own groove through movement, her body, music, and her own breathing. She searches for the soul of her inner rhythm, and to do this, she first listens to her own body, a body with memory that connects her to childhood memories, her origins, and the culture of the island she comes from: the indigenous Malagasy culture of Madagascar.

In the performance, she incorporates elements of Malagasy culture such as the 19th-century dance typical of Madagascar, called *Afindrafindrao*. She also blends some steps from the *Madison* dance, that is the first dance she learned as a child. Moreover, these elements are mixed with the electronic music of Sylvain Darrifourcq and hip-hop composer Alben Murenzi. All these components are part of her search for her inner rhythm as well.

In this way, reflecting on the entire performance along with the necessary distance from the experience, I can now make sense of the senses I went through during those 10 minutes of darkness. I can ask myself now: what did those minutes hold? What do I, as a spectator, hold? That moment of darkness confronted me with myself, myself as a product of a society conditioned by immediacy, speed, and impatience. And not only that, it made me observe myself. What initially seemed like

a test of waiting turned into a valuable exercise in proprioception, allowing myself to become aware of my inner state, to feel my body, my breath, my own rhythm.

It is striking how sometimes, if a pause is not imposed on us through waiting, whether in the theater or in another everyday situation, it often feels quite difficult to grant ourselves that moment to stop. It is precisely those moments of pause that create space for inner observation in a life governed by an agitated rhythm of consumption and productivity.

That is why, I believe that moment of darkness was likely an invitation from Ratsifandrihana to pause for a while and embark on the search for our own groove. A search that extends beyond the present moment, as she explores, and is shaped not only by our present but also by our personal history and culture. Yet perhaps, a moment of self-observation, a breath, is the first step to take.