



Press release  
17 June 2021

**Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, future Director  
of Ballet at the Grand Théâtre de Genève**

**The Board of Trustees for the Fondation du Grand Théâtre de Genève and its General manager, Aviel Cahn, are pleased to announce the nomination of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui to direct the Ballet of the Grand Théâtre, starting from the 2022-2023 season. A choreographer of international stature, very at home with opera, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui will take over the reign from Philippe Cohen, in charge of the Ballet until June 2022.**

A leading light in the Belgian contemporary scene, welcomed on classical and contemporary stages the world over, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui approaches dance as a dancer and choreographer, in ballet and opera, with a willing openness to more popular disciplines such as cinema, musicals and the pop music scene. Working with Damien Jalet, he recently presented in Geneva *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Grand Théâtre, on set designed by Marina Abramović. The dreamlike and symbolist production received critical acclaim and was broadcast on OperaVision and RTS. An internationally recognised talent, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui explores the issues of identity, relationships to others and gender while promoting intercultural dialogue in a physically exacting language.

“I know Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui well and I am happy he is joining us. We will benefit from his inventive, open, ambitious and sensitive outlook. We discussed and collaborated on artistic projects at the Opera Ballet Vlaanderen for several years and I am delighted with the projects he wants to share with the dancers in our Ballet and, more broadly, with our audiences and the dance scene in French-speaking Switzerland,” says Aviel Cahn, general manager at the Grand Théâtre.

“Many years ago, back in 2005, Artistic director Philippe Cohen invited me to choreograph for Le ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève. This was one of the earliest commissions I had from a contemporary ballet, and a wonderful boost in my career as a choreographer for repertory companies. It was also a milestone in my journey as an artist. I cherish my memories of creating *Loin*, which went on to tour extensively all over the world for many years, thanks to the initiative and engagement of the company. All these years and moments and creations later, it is, for me, a huge honour to come back and work at the Grand Théâtre de Genève, an even greater honour to follow in Philippe Cohen's footsteps as artistic director of the dance company. In the interim, I did have the opportunity to reconnect with the dancers, especially in the recent years, to restage *Fall*, *Exhibition* and *Pelléas & Mélisande*, created with Damien Jalet and Marina Abramović, in January 2021 at the Grand Théâtre. I am grateful to both Philippe and Aviel Cahn for entrusting me with this talented, spirited company, and I look forward to undertaking this exciting new adventure,” says Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

Trained at P.A.R.T.S., the prestigious school founded by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has created over 50 dance works. Some of his most representative pieces include *Boléro* at the Opéra national de Paris (with Damien Jalet, in 2013), *Sutra* with Shaolin monks (2008) and *Requiem* in 2017, at the Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, where he has directed the Ballet company since 2015. He is very familiar with the repertoire of classical and opera having worked on *The Firebird* by Stravinsky (Stuttgart Opera house, 2015), *Les Indes Galantes* by Rameau (2016), *Alceste* by Gluck (2019) at the Bayerische Staatsoper and *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass (2017) for Theater Basel. He founded his own company, Eastman, in 2010 through which he notably created and toured widely with *Babel<sup>(words)</sup>* (2010), *Puz/zle* (2012), *Fractus V* (2015) and *Icon* (2016). “best choreographer of the year” by *Tanz* magazine (2008, 2011, 2017), Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is a familiar face to audiences in French-speaking Switzerland after his performances at the Grand Théâtre de Genève of *Loin* in 2005 and 2008, *Fall* in October 2019 as part of *Minimal Maximal* and also *Pelléas et Mélisande* in January 2021.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's debut as a choreographer was in 1999 with Andrew Wale's contemporary musical, *Anonymous Society*. Since then he has made over 50 full-fledged choreographic pieces and picked up a slew of awards, including two Olivier Awards, three Ballet Tanz awards for best choreographer (2008, 2011, 2017) and the Kairos Prize (2009) for his artistic vision and his quest for intercultural dialogue.

Cherkaoui's initial pieces were made at les ballets C de la B – *Rien de Rien* (2000), *Foi* (2003) and *Tempus Fugit* (2004). He undertook parallel projects that both expanded and consolidated his artistic vision; *d'avant* (2002) with longstanding artistic partner Damien Jalet at Sasha Waltz & Guests company and *zero degrees* (2005) with Akram Khan. He has worked with a variety of theatres, opera houses and ballet companies. From 2004–2009 Cherkaoui was based in Antwerp as artist in residence at Toneelhuis, which produced *Myth* (2007) and *Origine* (2008).

In 2008 Cherkaoui premiered *Sutra* at Sadler's Wells. This award-winning collaboration with artist Antony Gormley and the Shaolin monks continues to tour the world to great critical acclaim. After his first commissioned piece in North America, *Orbo Novo* (Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet) and a series of duets such as *Faun* (which premiered at Sadler's Wells as part of *In the Spirit of Diaghilev*) and *Dunas* with flamenco danseuse María Pagés (both 2009), he launched his own company Eastman, resident at deSingel International Arts Campus (Antwerp).

Spring 2010 saw him reunited with choreographer Damien Jalet and Antony Gormley to make *Babel(words)* which won an Olivier. That same year he created *Rein*, a duet featuring Guro Nagelhus Schia and Vebjørn Sundby, as well as *Play*, a duet with Kuchipudi danseuse Shantala Shivalingappa and *Bound*, a duet for Shanell Winlock and Gregory Maqoma as part of *Southern Bound Comfort*. In 2011 he created *TeZukA* and *Labyrinth* (for the Dutch National Ballet). In 2012 he created *Puz/zle*, gaining him a second Olivier. That year he also collaborated with Joe Wright on his film *Anna Karenina*, for which Cherkaoui helmed the choreography.

2013 saw the premiere of *4D* and *生长genesis* (Eastman), *Boléro* (co-created with Damien Jalet and Marina Abramović, for the Paris Opera Ballet), and *milonga* (Sadler's Wells). He reunited with Joe Wright to co-direct *A Season in the Congo* at The Young Vic. In 2014, he created *Noetic* for the GöteborgsOperans Danskompani, *Mercy* (from *Solo for Two*) for Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev, which they performed at the London Coliseum and he directed his first opera, *Shell Shock*, for La Monnaie, with music by Nicholas Lens and text by Nick Cave.

In 2015, Cherkaoui directed his first full-length theatre production *Pluto* based on the award-winning manga series by Naoki Urasawa and Takashi Nagasaki at Bunkamura in Tokyo, bringing the beloved manga character Astro Boy to life on stage, and was movement director for Lyndsey Turner's *Hamlet* starring Benedict Cumberbatch at the Barbican Centre in London. He also made a trio *Harbor Me* commissioned by the L.A. Dance Project, and choreographed a new *Firebird* for Stuttgart Ballet. In the same year, Cherkaoui created a new production *Fractus V* for his company Eastman, in which he also performs.

Since 2015, Cherkaoui assumed the role of artistic director at the Royal Ballet of Flanders, where he has created *Fall* (2015), *Exhibition* (2016) and *Requiem* (2017). He combines this function with his title as artistic director of Eastman and keeps creating new work along with the artistic entourage of this company, for example *Qutb* (2016), a trio commissioned by Natalia Osipova, *Icon* (2016) and *Stoic* (2018) for GöteborgsOperans Danskompani and *Mosaic* (2017) for Martha Graham Dance Company. He directed the operas *Les Indes galantes* (2016) and *Alceste* (2019) for the Bayerische Staatsoper, *Satyagraha* (2017) for Theater Basel and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (2018) with Damien Jalet and Marina Abramović for Opera Vlaanderen. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is also associate artist at Sadler's Wells, London and Théâtre National de Bretagne, Rennes.

### Ballet of the Grand Théâtre de Genève

In 1962, the Grand Théâtre de Genève set up a permanent Ballet company with 22 artists that performs two original choreographic productions per season. Collaborating with internationally renowned choreographers under the direction of Philippe Cohen since 2003, it built up a worldwide reputation through its shows. Nowadays, the premières are still performed in Geneva, but the productions frequently travel far beyond the Swiss borders (France, Italy, the USA, Russia, Australia, China, Brazil, South Africa, etc.). Among the productions the GTG is known for, *Casse-Noisette* by Jeroen Verbruggen and *Tristan & Isolde* by Joëlle Bouvier will be performed in the 2021-22 season.

### Grand Théâtre de Genève

The Grand Théâtre de Genève is the largest artistic organisation in French-speaking Switzerland. The stage hosts lyric and choreographic productions based on the *stagione* (season) model and not repertoire. It also hosts performances of concerts and recitals. The entire programme ensures the Grand Théâtre will draw in the crowds both in Switzerland and abroad, reflecting its reputation for “Best Opera House 2020” as awarded by the leading magazine *Opernwelt*. The GTG has several teams divided between artistic, technical (in workshops or on the set) and administrative jobs. Each of the 350 or so members of staff at the Grand Théâtre and each of their jobs are vital for the creation and success of its artistic projects for audiences all around the world. Directed by Aviel Cahn since July 2019.

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