

# Amélie Joannides : Interview with a radiant dancer



Despite the lockdown, it was by video that I had the chance to meet the dancer Amélie Joannides. She is part of the prestigious corps de Ballet of the Opéra National de Paris, and has agreed to share her inspiring journey with me. Passionate and luminous, she opened up about her relationship to dance, to art, as well as to oneself. It is a trajectory full of energy and motivation that I suggest you discover through these few lines.

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**Could you present yourself in a few words and explain how you got into the prestigious Opéra de Paris**

I entered the Paris Opera dance school when I was nine years old, so I started dancing quite young, and it was my dance teacher at the time who offered me to go to auditions. So I did all my training there for seven years, each year validating the competition allowing me to continue to the next level. And at the end of those seven years, there is the competition to join the corps de ballet of the Paris Opera. So I passed it, and joined the troop when I was seventeen.

**How did it come to you that you wanted to be a professional dancer ?**

There really wasn't a « big moment », per se. In fact, when you enter dance school at age nine, the only thing you know is that you love dancing. We do not yet know if we like the profession of dancer because we do not know what it represents. So it was over the years that I was shown what it meant physically and mentally to be a professional dancer, and I told myself that it was fine for me. This is a school where there is so much pressure that you don't have time to ask too many questions ; we are caught up in the competition, and in particular the fact that we have to validate each year in order to be able to continue learning in dance school. So finally, all this questioning happens when you have joined the company, because you gradually realize what that implies.

In any case, for me, the certainty of loving dance has always been there, but I didn't know anything about the industry. When I entered the contest, I was told "you go to school in the morning and you dance in the afternoon" so obviously I said yes.

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**Once you finally asked yourself if you wanted to be a professional dancer, what made you want to continue despite everything it means ?**

Let's say that I first had a time of adaptation when I joined the corps de ballet. The imposed rhythm as well as the human exchanges did not suit me at first and meant that the beginning of my life as an opera dancer did not appeal to me right away. In addition, I lacked creativity, especially contact with the public with whom I had difficulty forming a relationship. Nevertheless, I have stayed all these years because I had a lot to learn, and it's an absolutely amazing place to learn not only as a dancer but especially as a person because it's so difficult that it puts us face to face with ourselves. Of course, I learned a lot technically from the teachers and choreographers who made me work.

So I had some really fundamental things to learn until I was 24-25! So even though I wondered a lot about this life as a dancer, I still had a lot to sort out personally and technically.

And then, subsequently, we had as ballet director Benjamin Millepied (great contemporary choreographer) and I really loved my years of directing with him. It made me want to stay, since I was stimulated during these two years, and I was also distributed well (by that we mean the roles assigned to it).

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**I imagine that you must be very passionate to do this job despite the difficulties. How did this willingness emerged ? Is it because of the many contests ?**

*{You should know that the company is divided into "grades" (the highest of which is that of principal dancer) that it is possible to climb through competitions that dancers can pass internally (if they are already dancers at the 'Opéra de Paris) or externally. Places are limited and vary depending on the departures or transfers of the dancers. The selection is extremely severe.}*

It's not the competitions in any case that motivate me, because it blocks me, I hate it. There is nothing human or artistic that would make the competition feed my passion. What motivates me is that I have personal and artistic projects related to dance. I've been working on it for two years, and it allowed me to redefine how I wanted to experience dance and not how I was told I had to experience it. So I asked myself what was my ideal ? But also what meaning I gave to dancing in the 21st century. Once I found answers to all of these questions, I moved on. I am sure there is a demand for dancing right now, and I am ready to step into it. This goes for art in general, but the great thing about dance is that we also talk about music, staging, and I love this intersection of disciplines. I am very sensitive to cinema for example, and to the way of representing dance, and this is the art that interests me. I approach it in a wider, more interesting and profound way.

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Staying in the corps de ballet gave me less pressure and expectations so I had time to ask myself these questions and find out who I was. It was hard at first to stay in the corps de ballet, but at the same time it gave me the opportunity to do my own thinking and that's what is important to me. I think you can't move people, and pass it on to them if you haven't lived. It's important for me as an artist to experience what people experience outside of the Opera's world, to identify with them, to know what they feel, otherwise how will they identify with what am I proposing? I think it's very important to be aware of the context in which you operate. However, I'm still running out of time because the corps de ballet puts on a lot of shows each year, which gives me a little time to rest. And then, as it's a very demanding job physically, sometimes you don't have the motivation to do something else when you're resting, and that's a dilemma that I'm constantly trying to resolve (laughs) !

I have found the relationship that I would like to have with the audience, and I hope that my projects will allow me to put it to work. These are projects that will, I hope, bring more dancing on social networks and in people's daily lives. In particular, I would like to offer videos, it is a large project, but in any case the way of filming the dance and putting it forward fascinates me.

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**6. How do you handle the fact that dancing is also your job ? Do you dance just when you work or are you dancing all the time, or different kind of dances on your free time ?**

I don't really feel the need to sort things out. The dance is there most of the time but it's not overbearing either ... well, maybe, but I like it so I don't have a problem with that. Rather, it was with the Opera itself that I had to learn how to make a difference. We had to learn that life into the company did not encroach too much on our privacy, and in particular that the physical and mental limits that this pushes back, do not spill over into the private. I had to become a dancer before I was an opera dancer.

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**What do you prefer to dance ?**

I love all styles of dance! At the moment I want to dance Balanchine (Co-founder and ballet master of New York City ballet, who laid the foundations of neoclassical ballet) because I miss it, I find that they are magnificent ballets where musicality is very present so it's nice to be able to dance on it. Otherwise currently I'm taking hip hop classes online because I love this style of dance ! I have phases ; sometimes it's very contemporary, classic, and other times more modern.

**Do you have some strong experience that you want to tell us about ?**

I'll take a recent thing: During the lockdown Hofesh Schechter (a famous Israeli dancer and choreographer) gave online masterclasses and it was the richest moment of my season. It was very touching to see people from all over the world on the screen let go and explore their limits. It reminded me how much how much I love it, but most of all the liberating, and I would say healing power of dancing. So it was a really, really great recent moment.

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**Where do you find your inspiration ? And do you have other talents ?**

Other talents, not really since I'm very bad at camera even though I have the images in my head (laughs). On the other hand, I write a lot, and have always done so. And as about my main inspiration,

I would say that's life! After that also comes a lot of music, cinema, etc. So I would say that my inspiration comes both from everyday life and from other art forms.

### **Which roles did you prefered ? Which ones would you love to dance ?**

I loved doing the trio in Don Quixote for the classic, and the soloist in Saburo Theshigawara so very contemporary. I had the chance to play La fille aux alouettes and to work with Simone Valastro (subject at the Paris Opera). It was extraordinary. And of course I did a creation with William Forsythe and I was chosen to put it together and it changed my life. It was "Blake Work", a world premiere for fifteen dancers from the Paris Opera.

Regarding the roles that I would have loved to play, there is the elected of Le Sacre du Printemps by Pina Bauch, and the bolero by Béjart, or why not Gisèle (choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot).

### **How do you identify to your characters ? Especially the older ones**

For traditional roles it's complicated because quite frankly I have trouble identifying myself for some. This is a real problem for me because I find it difficult to dance things that don't make sense, especially since I'm a part of the corps de ballet, I currently play a shadow (in the Bayadère, a ballet choreographed by Marius Petipa to music by Léon Minkus), so it's rather difficult to identify with a shadow (laughs)! However, I focus more on the technical aspect in this kind of role. I am very concerned about the aesthetic side, and thus wonder how to dance the best possible.

### **What does is represents for you to dance ?**

I'm going to answer on a personal level because if I start from a societal or cultural angle, I might not stop (laughs). So I will say that dancing, for me, is a way to express things that words cannot say, to bring people into my world, but also to connect with them.

### **If you weren't a dancer, what would you be ?**

I think that I'd be something into writing like journalism or reportage ; i really fancy that.

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### **To end with, what is culture for you ?**

The first thing I want to say is that it is essential, and that no longer needs to be demonstrated because since prehistoric times humans have made art, they have beaten drums, danced, drawn. So there's no need to question that. I believe it helps shape things that don't have a shape, that is to say emotions, ideas, but also memories that no longer exist. It makes it possible to give importance to things that don't have importance, to create a bond between people. To me, it reminds me of what we all have in common. Culture goes beyond all differences and allows us to reach this deep area within us that is common to all humans. I believe that art reveals things in ourselves that we didn't know we had in us. For example, we don't know why one painting will move us more than another, and that's good because it will reveal this new thing about us. I want to do this as an art! Come up with something for people to find these new aspects of themselves. Culture enlarges our person, our whole being.

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Finally, I want to defend the fact that everyone must realize how important it is to find an artistic activity, how saving it is. It can help so much, if not cure. Art is something serious and I would like us to realize that artists are serious and to break this image of acrobats.

### **Do you have any project to come ?**

We were supposed to play Bayadère at the Opera, but obviously it was canceled due to sanitary conditions. However, I believe that we will film it, and that it will be broadcast afterwards!

Thanks everyone for reading this article, hope you enjoyed it! If so, feel free to share it, and comment on it on [passionnementleblog.wordpress.com](https://passionnementleblog.wordpress.com). I thank Amélie once again for her time and kindness. You can find her on Instagram under the name @ Amelie.joannides. See you soon !



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