FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

SONOMA

INTERVIEW WITH MARCOS MORAU

***Sonoma* is your follow-up to *Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (*Surrealism in service of the Revolution*), a short piece inspired by filmmaker Luis Buñuel you created in 2016 for the Ballet de Lorraine. What made you want to delve into this world again?**

Marcos Morau: Buñuel is a reference for many image creators in Spain. To come back to him is to come back to the history of Spanish cinema and revisit tradition from a current perspective. I also feel this very strong personal connection with the filmmaker. We were both raised in Catholic schools for boys in the Spanish countryside. When he was old enough to leave for the city, he went to Madrid, while I went to Valencia and then Barcelona. Like me, he loved customs and traditions, but also looked towards the future, towards change and progress. With *Sonoma*, I wanted once again to turn in that direction, but with a wider scope. The point was to think about the type of show Buñuel could have created in this new century, with women, in a different location, but with the same obsessions he always had.

The title calls on images that might evoke strange rituals or dreamlike sequences. What's its meaning?

The word "Sonoma" doesn't exist in Spanish. If it did, it would come maybe from the Greek *soma*, which means body, or from the Latin *sonum*, which means sound: the body of the sound, and the sound of the body. Nowadays, we experience history at such a high speed that we can barely keep up. It's a headlong dive, and during this sped-up fall—like in a rollercoaster—we scream. *Sonoma* could be the sound of the body as it falls, or the rage of a human being determined to keep believing we're alive and awake. But *Sonoma* also means something else. In the Native American language of Sonoma County in California, it means "valley of the moon." According to an old story, the moon comes to lie in its plains every night. There, the screams and the drums form a hypnotic pulsation, like a lullaby which wouldn't excite us but calm us down.

Rhythm seems to be a key element, as much in terms of choreography, scenography, and narrative. The drumbeat Luis Buñuel loved so much, the flow of words chanted at different levels of intensity, the tempo of your movements, sometimes flowing, sometimes halting…

I went to Calanda a few years ago, and to Andorra and Alcañiz, all those key cities of Bajo Aragón, where the drums play such an important role in the local folklore. I remember experiencing unique sensations. People standing very close to each other—which is hard to imagine now, with the pandemic—to beat on a drum together and make it resonate powerfully. They've hoped for this moment for an entire year and are beating the drum with zeal, knowing that here is a tradition which belongs to them, which has been passed down from one generation to the next and has now become mystical, almost religious in nature. Rhythm is very important in *Sonoma*, the rhythm of voices, of dances, of sequences. In Luis Buñuel's films, the rhythm is unpredictable, it doesn't follow logic but obeys instincts and irrational forces typical of surrealism. It's beautiful to be able to raise the drums up to the stage, to shine a light on them, to bring them into the present, to shout with them. As for the work on the body, there are two dimensions to it: one side is wild and tenacious, the other scattered, fragmented, close to Cubism. It obeys a mental logic and an instinctive approach. The group almost in its entirety is presented as a "horde," a collective, a unified battalion. We worked on composing living tableaux, dripping with anger, and in which irony plays an important part, hidden or highlighted. That's also a reference to Buñuel. The goal wasn't to work on him but for him. La Veronal has always tried to bring together different images, situations, and energies around a theme, all the better to show a vision of it, a perspective, a representation. We wanted *Sonoma*, even more so than other shows, to be articulated around the idea of tableaux, and for them to appear as light and shifting as possible: it brings to mind the structure of dreams, with their empty spaces, their time skips, their incongruities, their lack of narrative economy, their rather surrealist play on intensity and focus. It can bring to mind the way a cinematographic production expresses itself.

We also wanted there to be several lines of progression in the show—or rather several metamorphoses: for instance, from a cross to a drum, from Catholicism to revolution, from Christ to Dionysos, from the word to the voice, to the body, and then to the body of the pure and explosive sound of the drums of Calanda, and then to the skin. To the skin under the skin.

What do all those sources of inspiration bring, once mixed together?

One could say that nothing is truer than folklore which has religious meaning, but religious in the peasant tradition. Luis Buñuel was fascinated by Aragon folklore because in the dryness of its landscape, in its celebrations, its clothes, its dances, and its superstitions, he knew there was something akin to the avant-garde. Elements of tradition are like enigmas that are just waiting to be deciphered, which makes them an incredible allegory for "Us". We usually see tradition as a continuous line, and it is as this continuity that we understand and love it. But here, it's presented according to models of discontinuity: its objects, its signs no longer belong to an order, but start to float like new entities, like a language which would talk to us now, in the 21st century. We wanted *Sonoma* to be about this form of timelessness, which allows us to bring together the most rural and telluric images with a very current moment of as yet unfulfilled freedom.

The texts read were inspired by religious writings. Why did you choose to have them said in French by the dancers?

I think there is a connection to draw between the idea of the word, of writing even, and in particular of sacred writing, and a masculine cosmic vision that revolves around symbolic obsessions. And we can immediately connect the mystery of the voice, the body of the word, its music, to a world we see as feminine, somatic, placental, from the moment we first felt the inside of the womb, the voice of our mother talking to us, moving us. The "*pain of sound*", as Pascal Quignard would say, comes from that deep place. It was therefore essential to come back, on the one hand to the declaratory character of the chorus, to the vocal gestures of protestation, of the appeal, of collective accusation… and on the other hand to the possibility of using the voice around the dancing body. Not with the goal of harmonising movements and meanings, but precisely with that of showing that the body is the element of sound that transfigures the meaning of writing. The first version of those texts, in particular when it comes to tone, to the structure of the psalms, to the rhythm, was developed for the show *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. For *Sonoma*, we went back to the Beatitudes, to the Commandments, and to other forms of texts, and worked within those structures. We chose French because it's the language of the Revolution, the official language of Surrealism, and because we knew it was the language Luis Buñuel would have used today. There was also something attractive in the idea of showing an imperfect French pronunciation. It can bring to mind the Spanish Surrealists, who had to immerse themselves in a linguistic climate that wasn't theirs, who had to produce a powerful effect of plastic transfiguration with a language which, in their mouths, became a great body of sounds, a fickle matter.

Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz in February 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach