

**Acceptance speech: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui at the Kairos Prize Awards Ceremony
Hamburg 15th February 2009**

I must be honest and confess that after every project I made, every piece I created, I felt like it was the last one. It felt like I would never want to go into such an intense and emotional experience ever again.

Even from the very beginning, when I finished the creation of *Rien de Rien*, I remember saying “I am really not made for this,” to Damien Jalet – one of my closest artistic partners and someone who has given so much of himself, so much raw dance material and food for thought to every creation I did after that, and one of the first people I’d like to thank upon getting this prize.

He was the first one to tell me to keep going, to not give up just yet, that there was more to be shared, more to be retold, more to be danced, more to be discovered, more to do. This was after my first piece, in 2000. Only nine years ago, but it feels like twenty-five. After *Foi*, I had the same feeling, after *Tempus Fugit* too, also after *Sutra* just last year in 2008. Each time it felt like the end of everything (for very different reasons). Being exhausted from the whole making process, the social interactions necessary to make a certain move happen, people’s insecurities, the critics’ eyes, the growing pains of the ego So many elements don’t make it appealing to try and make art. But, always someone or something came to motivate me again; to make me reconsider and not give up on making art, and not give up on sharing the experience. This time, it is the Kairos Prize that gives me this boost to keep rolling forward.

Choreography has this strange, schizophrenic element to it, which is that you are a lonely artist who is in constant, intense relationship with everyone you work with. As a painter, when I was younger, I remember the loneliness in art making. As a choreographer, you basically have the opposite as you are constantly explaining, constantly showing or asking, constantly working on diplomacy and translation to make things possible on stage. This prize, in many ways, I see as an encouragement to keep going; to keep believing in diplomacy and translation. To keep trying to see things as together, as an ensemble as opposed to seeing things as apart from one another. My philosophy is one of equality. Something I try to apply each day in my work. It’s never easy to accept or respect other people’s ideas or directions, sometimes they seem so far away from what we want ourselves, from our own truths. As an artist, I have tried more and more to focus on what others – my colleagues, my friends – want to share. Not for lack of personal ideas (as an individual idealist, I grew up with enough dreams for more than one lifetime), neither to blindly give them what they want, but rather find an idea, a dream you could say, we could all share.

What I like in dance, or art, is the bringing together of all of us, like a ritual around a fire. So many things take us apart, make us think individually, it is nice there still exists this coming together of souls just for the sake of the ritual and a common self-reflection that can go with it. I am one of those who believe art **does** reflect the colours of society; it gives us a possibility to see certain parts of ourselves.

It's the sharing of the Ideal that creates the momentum to make things happen. I’d say the secret lies in finding the common denominator. The way two things, two dreams can become one. Another element in the work I try to make is the importance of the multiplicity in one self. You are never just one thing, one character, one function but rather each of us has the ability to perform many different functions, within a project but also in life. By recognizing this multiplicity in oneself, you realise that “the Other” (being the other performer, the new

culture you discover, or the audience even) is often buried somewhere inside you too. I realise, for instance, when I was in the Shaolin Temple, that a lot of the human elements that appealed to me in China were things I could definitely nurture within myself. I had it in there somewhere. It was just easier to see it outside of me. “The Other” is somewhere inside of you. It’s never really detached from you, and it is this bond that makes me keep looking for other links. It’s a never-ending search for interconnectedness, for common roots. It’s a search of relationships. I could say I am still looking for the real differences in human natures, in the human body. But having travelled and worked in so many different environments, I find that the basic human nature is so similar everywhere.

The Kairos prize is about recognition at the right moment, and linked to the right moment are the right people. I’m very honoured and thankful to have been considered for this prize, and would like to share this moment with certain people, some of whom are here, and some who couldn’t make it.

I would like to thank Szymon Brzóska for his beautiful music, mental support and understanding. My project manager and friend, Karthika Naïr for her vision and sensitivity to the directions I’m trying to take.

From Belgium, I would like to thank the director, Guy Cassiers, An-Marie Lambrechts and all the people from Toneelhuis, where I have been a resident artist since 2006. I thank Peter de Caluwe and La Monnaie for believing in and supporting my projects with so much passion. Nienke Reehorst for her artistic and human perceptiveness through all these years. Guy Cools for translating emotion into words. And a special thanks to Frederik Verrote, Erik Temmerman, Kristien deCoster and Koen Lizen for being the partners and guiding spirits with whom I can find my future company Eastman.

From England, I would like to thank Alistair Spalding and his team at Sadler’s Wells who made the near-impossible come true, they are the producers of Sutra, and Suzanne Walker in particular for being a great producer. I’d like to thank also the visual artist Antony Gormley for his ability to open his work to other fields like dance. Akram Khan for being such a good friend and incredible dancer/ choreographer. Farooq Chaudhary for his wisdom and generosity.

From Japan, I would like to thank Hisashi Itoh who understands my quest for knowledge with incredible ease, and for having led me to meet so many incredible people.

From Corsica, I thank Jean-Claude Acquaviva, and all the singers from A Filetta for sharing so much of their time, their beautiful voices and harmonies. Their powerful vision is forever an extreme inspiration. To Valérie Salducci for her help and support. To Gioia Masala and Rodolphe Lucas for sharing today with me, sharing their dance and reviving memories of *In memoriam*. Dimitri Jourde for his incredible movements and his honesty.

From Italy, I thank Patrizia Bovi and her incredible clarity and voice, as well as her musicians from the Ensemble Micrologus. Special love to Christine Leboutte who was the first to teach me to sing and believe in my voice, and with whom I have shared so many songs. Also Juan Kruz Diaz De Garaio Esnaola, who works with Sasha Waltz, here in Germany. I would like to thank Sasha Waltz. And Pina Bausch for showing the way.

So many people from China to Spain to America.... All these borders don't mean much anymore to me as the connections, the threads between us are what remain, delicate yet strong and life sustaining.

I have saved it for the last, probably because I am not sure just how to express the heart-felt, sincere gratitude I feel, my thanks to the jury of the Kairos prize, for this prize that comes from an unexpected corner, for giving sense to the word "serendipity". To the board and personnel of the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, and above all, Ansgar Wimmer and Uta Gielke, for the call that came, like that god, *at the right moment*; for their understanding and accompaniment and the joy with which they have made the ceremony happen, their attentiveness to every detail.

Thank you.