

# SYMPHOC PRINCESS BARI



EUN-ME AHN

# SYMPHOCÀ PRINCESS BARI

EUN-ME AHN

Choreography, artistic direction & scenography

**Text :** Young-Gu Park

**Music :** Young-Gyu Jang

**Lightings design :** Jin-Young Jang

**Sound :** Young-Hoon Oh

**Danceurs :**

Eun-Me Ahn, Wan-Young Jung, Young-Min Jung, Hyun-Woo Nam, Si-Han Park, Ki-Bum Kim, Hye-Kyong Kim, Ji-Hye Ha, Ei-Sul Lee

**Singers :**

Hee-Moon Lee, Yi-Ho Ahn, Min-Hee Park, Eun-Hye Jung, Suk-Gui Yoon

**Musicians :**

Be-Being band : Soona Park, Wonil Na, Ji-Yoon Chun, Won-Young Shin, Youn-Gun Kim

**Running time :** 90 minutes

**Booking :**



Jean-Marie Chabot  
E-mail : jm@gadjaprod.com  
Tel. : +33 (0)6 01 32 04 98



# SYMPHOCA PRINCESS BARI



Deamons in polka dot dresses, magician-healers on platform shoes, temple servants with pink rubber gloves or spitiits floating in the air in their birthday suit... Resolutely faithful to tradition and absolutely pop, *Symphocca Princess Bari* deploys some treasures of choeographic and formal inventiveness to fit the millenary epic better into modern days.

Pansori singers and bad boys from Seoul, scooters and parasols, balloons and lamé mix with harmony in this opulent production, bringing together dancers, singers and musicians. Behind this crazy "Symphocca", one find a dazzling creator, Eun-Me Ahn, that France discovered at festival Paris Quartier d'été, with a total , intimate and blazing work.

Famous Korean shamanist tale, the Princess Bari epic finds thank to her an interpretation as radical as it is faithful. Abandoned by her father the King - who wanted to have a boy - and thrown to the see, the princess is taken into by a fisherman and will have to face many ordeals and many adventures to save her severely ill father. An initiatic journey and a story of courage and fidelity - that has been reinterpreted along centuries in novels, television series and mangas - celebrating forgiveness and the power of women.

*Lola Gruber (extrait du programme de Paris Quartier d'Eté)*

# THE LEGEND OF PRINCESS BARI

The story of Princess Bari is the one of an abandoned princess who will have to make a dangerous and painfull travel in the hereafter to find the elixir of life, the only medicine able to save her parents. It is nowadays one of the most popular myths in Korea and one can find over 50 versions in all regions of the country. Here is one of them:

A very long time ago, at Chosun age (an ancient Korean dynasty), a king consulted a shaman to ask about the future of his son Ogu, who was 15 years old at the time.

She announced to the king that the young prince would be wedd before the end of the year and would be striked with the misfortune of having seven daughters. If however, it was not the case, he would have the happiness of having three boys. The king paid very little attention to this prophecy. Ogu got married within the year and inherited his father's throne not long after. In accordance to the shaman's predictions, GilDae, the wife of the new king gabe birth to six daughters, but not to an heir. The king desperately wanted to have a seventh child who could carry on the dynasty but once again, the child was a girl. Outraged, he ordered that the child shall be named «Baridégi» (the one who has to be abandoned) and to get ridd of her. He wanted to sacrifice this baby to the gods to expiate his sins and beg forgiveness for not having repected the gods commands.

Locked in a jade box, the baby was handed over to the waves. When the princess was about to be flooded, a giant golden turtle came to her rescue and saved her. It was Shukamoni, the Bouddah, who had ordered it to get the box. Shukamoni found the babby and entrusted it to a old fishermen couple who raised it as their own daughter.

At age 16, Princess Bari started to ask questions about her origins and begged her adoptive parents to reveal her the truth about her identity.

Meanwhile, the king and the queen both got seriously ill, without any obvious reasons. The best doctors of the kingdom were unable to find a medicine to cure them. The king asked one last time the shaman why they were striked by this illness. She answered him that they would die the same day at the same time for having abandoned their seventh daughter.

The following night, the king and the queen had an identical dream. They saw a boy dressed in blue who told them that they could only be saved by the elixir of life that only could be fine in the hereafter world. He added that only the daughter they had abandoned would be able to save their life.

King Ogu sent his minister all over the country in the search for the princess. He finally found her and brought her back to the palace. Her parents asked for her forgiveness and explained her the situation. The princess forgave them and went alone to get the elixir of life, having taken the precaution of asking her sisters and the subjects of the realm not to organize funerals, even if their parents were to die during her absence.

During her journey, she met again with Shukamoni, who gave her his blessing and offered her a silk flower with magical powers that would allow her to escape from the many dangers awaiting her in her quest. Thanks to her kindness and the help provided to people in need, she arrives to the river that divides the world of the living from the one of the deads, and crosses it thanks to the magic flower. In the hereafter, she meets Moujanseong, the guardian of the elixir of life who imposes her a series of ordeals. The princess accepts during three years to draw water for him, to collect logs for him and to cook for him. She even accepts Moujanseong's desire to get married. Together, they will have seven children. Seven sons.

After having completed these tasks, the princess finally gets the elixir of life and goes back home with her family.

When she arrives to her father's kingdom, she learns that her parents died and that one is about to proceed with the funerals. Thanks to the elixir of life, she brings her parents back to life. Full of gratitude, her father wanted to offer her half of his kingdom, but the princess refused and asked him to make her goddess of shamans instead.

Princess Bari is still today the protecor of shamans and she is venerated in a temple dedicated to her.

It is her who guides the souls of the deads to the hereafter, but above all, the souls filled with remorse who wander between the world of the living and the world of the deads. She comforts the sad souls and convince ghosts to abandon the obsessions of this world to start a new life in the hereafter.

# EUN-ME AHN



*« Laugh and grow fat.  
Dance and grow fat. »*

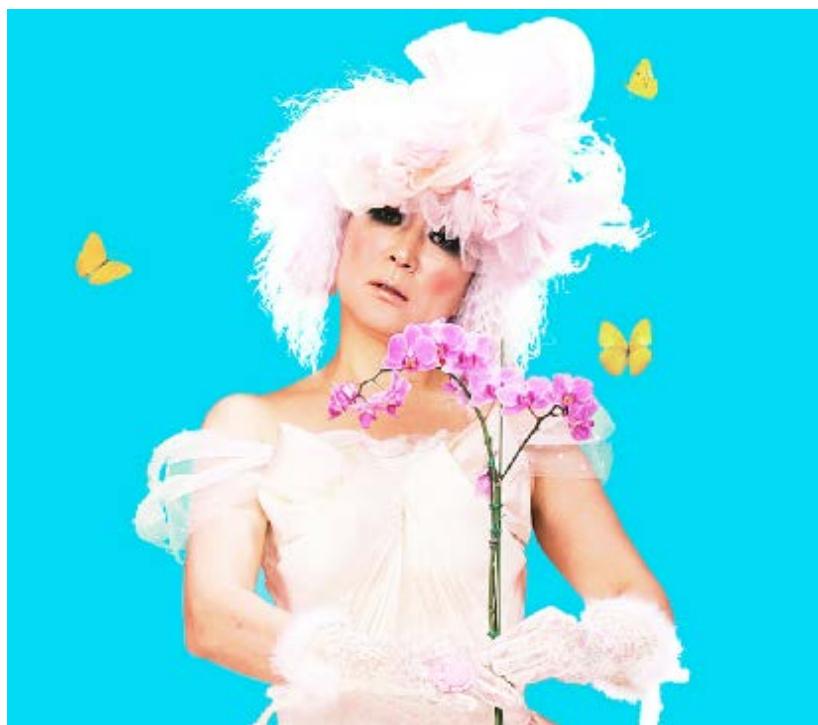
Ah, the famous custard pie that is the confrontation “between tradition and modernity”...

How many creators have struggled to find the way to describe what is finally the lot of every artist : on the one hand to know, understand, integrate what the ancients did ; on the other to forgot them, overcome them and hope to find something new. Quite a vast program...

On this level, Eun-Me Ahn that France discovered in 2013 and 2014 thanks to Festival Paris Quartier d'Eté, has found new, unexpected and exciting ways. This comes first from her own itinerary, marked as much by the

learning and exploration of shamanic traditions as by the many years spent in New York or a profound friendship with the missed Pina Bausch (who invited her many times in Wuppertal). Korean and cosmopolitan, figure of the avant-garde but also choreographer of the very official opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup in Daegu in 2002 and presented in the most important international festivals, she knows how to improve the beauties of contrast, mix polka dots, stripes and flowers, how to play with the most pop colors before switching to the most solemn austerity, how to play with the most subtle shades of androgyny, or use slowness to make trance rhythm burst...

Educated at the school of rigor, precise, demanding and of all Korean discipline, Eun-Me Ahn is also a daredevil performer, ready for all kind of piracies. One have seen her jump from the top of a crane, then attack a piano with axe and scissors, rip off herself her fairy dress made of white ties to distribute the pieces to the audiences while performing a teddybear dance, bury herself with a clown costume under a rain of balloons, locked up behind bars in a duet with a chicken, or dressed up as a mushroom... But one would be wrong thinking it is provocation. It is rather the affirmation of a curiosity and a freedom held by work and style pushed to their most unexpected limits.



# EUN-ME AHN

## I @ FEW DATES

**1963** - Birth in Republic of Korea

**1974** - Begins to dance, initiates herself to Korean shamanic practices, discovers the work of Isadora Duncan and western countries contemporary dance

**1986-1992** - Dances with Korean Modern Dance Company and Korean Contemporary Dance Company in Séoul

**1989** - Graduated from Seoul E-Wha University

**1994** - Departure for New York City. Graduated from Tisch School of the Arts

**1999-2000** - Receives Manhattan Foundation for the Arts Award and New York Foundation for the Arts Award

**2001** - After several visits to the Pina Bausch Festival à Wuppertal, she presents three solos from the *Tomb* there.

**2001-2004** - Returns to live in South Korea where she is appointed Artistic Director of Daegu Metropolitan City Dance Company for which she creates, amongst others *The Little Match Girl* and *Sky Pepper*

**2002** - Choreography of the Fifa World Cup opening ceremony in Daegu in South Korea

**2007** - Creation of *Sympheca Princess Bari*, a choreographic adaptation of a Korean legend, that will be presented at Seoul ARCO Art Center in Korea, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch Festival in Germany, BOZAR in Belgium, Edinburgh Autumn Festival in Scotland...

**2011** - Creation of *Dancing Grandmothers*, a work inspired by the gestures of Korean old ladies.

# IN THE PRESS

## Le Monde

Brindezingué, éberluant, délivrant... Les adjectifs se dégoumment les uns les autres pour épingle le spectacle Symphoca Princess Bari, mis en scène par la chorégraphe coréenne Eun-me Ahn. Idem lorsqu'on rencontre la «danseuse au crâne chauve» comme on la surnomme à Séoul. Tout aussi sidérante, drôle par-dessus le marché, Eun-me Ahn, 50 ans tout frais dans sa petite robe jaune à fleurs, ne démerite pas dans cet opéra techno pop pétant de couleurs depuis les chaussettes vertes des danseurs jusqu'à leur slip à pois roses. «Je choisis jusqu'à la couleur des culottes de mes interprètes», précise-t-elle comme une bonne blague.

A la ville comme à la scène, Eun-me Ahn n'y va pas avec le dos de la cuillère. Programmée pour la première fois en France, à l'affiche de Paris Quartier d'été, celle qui compte déjà une centaine de pièces à son répertoire depuis la création de sa compagnie au début des années 1990, veut faire sonner les trompettes de sa renommée par-delà la Corée. «*Un critique de Séoul m'a prédit un succès encore plus énorme que celui de Choi Seung-hee, qui fut une vedette internationale dans les années 1930, c'est dire, assène-t-elle en riant. Je voulais venir à Paris, j'y suis, je vais peut-être y rester.*» Elle grimace, roule des billes, puis redevient grave en une seconde. «Je ne suis pas que fun», tient-elle à préciser.

## UN CONTE CORÉEN CHAMANIQUE

On l'avait deviné. Symphoca Princess Bari, créé en 2007, croise les fils tragi-comiques ensanglantés d'une fable morale plus contemporaine qu'elle n'en a l'air à première vue. A l'origine de ce spectacle pour neuf danseurs et cinq musiciens live, un conte coréen chamanique qui met en scène un roi et une reine, parents de six filles, et désireux d'avoir un fils. Autant dire que la septième fille finit jetée à la mer dans un berceau. De ce scénario, Eun-me Ahn a changé un paramètre : elle fait interpréter la jeune princesse par un homme. «*J'ai aussi voulu ajouter une dimension hermaphrodite au personnage pour rendre le scénario vraiment inconfortable, commente-t-elle. L'interprète que j'ai choisi chante avec une voix haut perchée comme il se doit dans la tradition coréenne. Cela ajoute à la confusion.*» Et à l'ambiguïté violente de certaines scènes sexuelles.

Eun-me Ahn entend faire passer quelques vérités essentielles sur la liberté d'être soi et militer pour une cause : celle des gays. «*La société coréenne est terriblement sous contrôle et dominée par les hommes, observe-t-elle. L'homosexualité était encore considérée comme une maladie il y a dix ans. J'ai rencontré des gays pour la première fois de ma vie à New York lorsque j'avais 30 ans. Ce sont les personnes qui m'ont le plus appris.*»

## UN DRÔLE DE CLOWN

Avant New York, celle qui affirme que «*la vie est une lutte à laquelle il faut survivre*» avait déjà un bagage artistique de choix. Née à Séoul dans une famille modeste, Eun-me Ahn a longtemps harcelé sa mère pour apprendre à danser. «*Il n'y avait pas d'argent pour ça, se souvient la chorégraphe. Jusqu'à mes 12 ans. J'ai commencé à suivre des cours de danse traditionnelle coréenne. Mais c'était trop simple pour moi !*» Elle file apprendre la technique Martha Graham, puis intègre l'université féministe Ewha de Séoul. Un an avant de partir à New York, en 1992, elle se rase les cheveux et présente une performance, entièrement nue et peinte en rouge. «*Les spectateurs étaient tellement choqués qu'ils ont passé plus de temps à discuter entre eux qu'à regarder ma danse*», dit-elle.

Eun-me Ahn est un drôle de clown. L'écouter raconter sa rencontre – entre admiration et jalousie mi-jouées, mi-assumées –, avec Pina Bausch est un régal. En 2000, de retour à Séoul, elle accepte d'emmener la chorégraphe allemande dans un des fameux marchés de nuit de la ville. Pour l'occasion, elle arbore un tutu blanc. Elle invite finalement Pina Bausch à boire un verre. «*C'est là qu'on est devenues amies*». Comme avec ses danseurs qu'elle auditionne en les emmenant eux aussi au karaoké pour boire et chanter jusqu'à point d'heure.

Rosita Boisseau - 16 juillet 2013

## The Guardian

*Continuing the Edinburgh international festival's inspirational exploration of Asian performance, this sparkling company brings a galactic energy, despite its small number, to one of the biggest theatres in the UK. Eun-Me Ahn's rendering of the dark shaman legend of Princess Bari, the seventh daughter of a Korean king raised by fishermen and destined to travel the underworld, is a runaway success with its eye-poppingly eccentric collage of contemporary and traditional music and choreography, seamlessly influenced by both east and west.*

*The Buddhist-inspired costumes alone could eat up all the words of this review – mostly unisex dresses of raw symbolic colour ringing the changes with polka dots, sovereign-sized sequins, hats, red parasols, golden fans and metallic silks creating an exotic surreality that transports us to another place for an hour and a half. Eight dancers, five singers and five musicians, as well as Ahn herself in a couple of charismatic cameos, achieve a fusion of colour and movement, heady in its intensity. Performers run and roll, promenade with stately poise, slither down the incline created by the sloped stage, and become one as they ride each other's shoulders.*

*Grafting her training in traditional Korean dance on to contemporary western techniques, Ahn's choreography, set and costume design deliver a revelatory, personal style that pits a physical playfulness and humour against rigorous intelligence. Like that of her friend Pina Bausch, her work grips us from the start, gliding from fast to slow, crawling to flying, shuffling to bouncing, all feats these performers project with audacious skill. The music of the oboe, fiddle, zither and drums (both modern and traditional) is richly combined with the mouth music of p'ansori and funeral songs. Beguilingly foreign to western ears and eyes, it all makes for sensational theatre.*

Alice Bain - August 21st, 2011

## The Telegraph

*Korean contemporary dance is not a subject on which many people in Britain are expert. So it was hard to know what to expect from the visit of the Eun-Me Ahn company to the Edinburgh International Festival – and difficult to know what to think once it was over.*

*According to the programme, the legend of Princess Bari is a story of filial devotion, of the seventh daughter cast out by her father who nevertheless offers to go to the spirit world to save his life. There she suffers terrible degradation before returning, with seven sons in tow, to bring happiness and resolution to the story.*

*You wouldn't guess any of this from what you see on stage. What you get instead is an entirely baffling sequence of striking moments, some of them stunningly beautiful, all of them brightly coloured and energetic.*

*There is much to enjoy, particularly a solo from Eun-Me Ahn herself, in what appears to be traditional Korean style, the movement shuddering through her in waves. Yet this type of movement is never repeated.*

*Instead, super-athletic performers dash around, whirring in acrobatic jumps, back-flips and turns, wearing frocks and socks. They never stop moving: sometimes swishing past like skaters, sometimes threatening like warriors as they surround Princess Bari (danced, naturally, by a man.)*

Among this series of ceaseless processions, come the singers, swaying like dolls in their shiny robes. At one moment, a man grabs hold of one of the women, tipping her sideways as she screeches in apparent pain, pulling a swath of red fabric behind her. It is extraordinarily powerful and may represent Bari's rape, but I don't know because there are no surtitles.

Princess Bari is vigorous enough to hold the attention despite such wilful obscurity, but Last Orders, by the David Hughes Dance company, doesn't even do that.

The images are frightening, the sound compelling, and the dancers superb. But, since choreographer Al Seed can't be bothered to communicate his meaning, you wonder why you have bothered to give him an hour of your time.

Sarah Crompton - August 22nd, 2011