

**"Violence & passion"**

Dance Review by Luc Boulanger

October 24, 2015 edition

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The philosopher Blaise Pascal said that all of humanity's miseries stem from man's inability to sit still in a room. Imagine our unhappiness in a prison.

**On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, PPS Danse had the idea to revisit a major and powerful work from its repertoire, one it had presented 115 times here and abroad. And to present two excellent young dancers at the peak of their physicality in performance.**

Created in 1993, BAGNE remains a monumental work. In scenes of cruel beauty punctuated with gestures of supreme virility and tenderness, BAGNE depicts the imprisonment of human beings. These two performers in captivity evoke our inner prisons, our inability to break the chains of our egos, the difficulty to reach out to the other.

While BAGNE is clearly homoerotic with all the tensions and passions of the male body, it transcends homosexuality. In 1998 the choreographers also created a female version which was performed in Montreal and New York.

In the current version at the Cinquième Salle, Lael Stellick and Milan Panet-Gigon play on the ambiguity of a troubled neo-masculinity, young men whose reference points and models are clearly slipping away.

**Intense No Exit**

The choreographies have been revived by Hall and Savoie. The dance-theatre aspect of the original version remains but is spectacularly more vigorous and acrobatic, closer to today's circus world. There is little dance on the floor, but multiple jumps in space, suspensions by the arms and legs, duos where each one grips and clings on the other's body.

The physicality devised by Hall and Savoie is intense and radical, like their own artistic quest. Bernard Falaise offers a new music for this recreation. His soundtrack juxtaposes with the noise of metal and doors slamming, with mics inserted in the decor to amplify the sense of no exit.

**Superb Set Design**

Also deserving of mention is the superb stage set by Bernard Lagacé with its giant metallic split-level cage. A curtain of silver panels at the rear of the stage transforms under the magnificent lighting of Marc Parent, with the suggestion of a door.

**Does it lead to heaven or hell? You're free to choose by attending this highly successful show.**

**BAGNE** \*\*\*\*

By Pierre-Paul Savoie and Jeff Hall

At the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts until October 31, as part of Danse Danse

On tour: December 8 and 9 at the Grand Théâtre, Quebec City; January 14 at the Théâtre de la Ville, Longueuil;

January 16 at the Théâtre de la Rubrique, Saguenay

**"Prisons that confine and protect us"**

by Elise Boileau

October 22, 2015

**22** years later, we had no expectations.

Time had elapsed, some had seen the original version in 1993, others were seeing the world of BAGNE for the first time last evening. For this redux at the Cinquième Salle, Jeff Hall and Pierre-Paul Savoie have recreated their roles for Lael Stellick and Milan Panet-Gigon in a new version well-deserving of the applause received last night.

The title prepares us, as does the stage set. An imposing metal structure defines the space backed by a stunning rear wall of glittering panels and the image of a doorframe opened just a crack. As the lights dim, a match flares upstage hidden by the first inmate. Then we see the second inmate, torso bare, crawling on all fours passing the doorway. We feel the intensity of the bodies in their own presence. When the prison doors slam shut, the audience becomes freedom, the two inmates captivity. The movements of the metal chain-grid set a scene of stunning physicality from the start. The protagonists case the prison, real-life acrobats trying to see what's outside – ourselves – from every angle. Upside-down, suspended, hanging by hands, bodies solid, alive, eloquent.

When night falls, the universe suddenly shifts to a dreamlike calm. The sensuality between the two beings emanates from the choreography and the performers.

The bunks are metaphorical and spark a spatial interplay between the two protagonists. Bernard Falaise has updated and adapted the soundtrack for this re-creation, extending the drama of each moment, focusing the intensity of the stage action to great effect. At times pervasive, at times subdued, it echoes the ambiance of the cage already amplified by mics that exacerbate the violence of the metal grid. Kudos!

Bagne speaks for our times. It confronts, grips and acts within us, unimpeded. The beauty of the bodies suspended on the bars intensifies the gravity. The Earth's gravity, the gravity of imprisoned souls. The violence of one is mirrored in the calmness of the other, though the roles interchange. We perceive a dual soul in the same body.

Body to body, they become increasingly real. We succumb to the animal and visceral confrontation, its reality, admittedly very masculine. The prison becomes the arena in which the bodies are hurled against the resounding bars. The dancers throw themselves, collide, hit, crash against each other. Yet there is cathartic power in witnessing this scene, where nothing is held back. The dancers eat the grid-work.

Then a fleeting smile on their faces surprises us, astonished to grasp that these inmates almost feel better inside the cage than outside. A final breathe in the smoky darkness, then... curtains. Literally, and for the performance.





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**The return of “BAGNE”,  
a major work in Quebec dance**

Review by Denis-Daniel Boullé

October 22, 2015

An enormous cage, or prison, in which two men are living. Prisoners, mentally ill, captive animals, whatever. This incarceration with one's likeness predominates, regardless. This likeness who shares the same rages and the same hopes, that of a future freedom, even if it terrifies.

In re-creating BAGNE 20 years later, choreographers Pierre-Paul Savoie and Jeff Hall have forged a path of unlikely freedom in this confined prison universe. The first Bagne was a huge success with audiences and this completely re-worked second version is just as seductive.

On stage, two men are living in a spare, constricted space. They are each other's sole companion and each must assert himself against the other, or risk disappearing. Two dancers with different physiques submit to sharing the space, but not without revolt. Amid the romps, fights, seduction, power plays, Pierre-Paul Savoie and Jeff Hall have devised a very physical choreography that veers to circus and stunts, yet where all the gestures, movements and shifts in space recall dance, even as the dancers hurl themselves or are slammed against the grids. Emotion begins in the brief halting moments, a hand trying to grip a wall to suspend, meets the other.

While this private world happening on stage might seem an ode to virility, the choreographers quickly breach the norm to reveal the hidden faces of the men, expressing their desire for the other, for tenderness, friendship, awkwardly yet resolute. This mutual love or desire emerges with the bed of fortune that separates the two bodies yearning to approach each other, a metaphor for our self-imprisonment and our inner walls that we dare not breach.

These contradictory emotional battles, struggling for release, are closer to Genet and Koltes. And as the dancers' bodies abandon themselves and then resist they betray these inner dilemmas deftly and precisely.

Milan Panet-Gigon and Lael Stellick form this unlikely couple, combining virtuosity with strength and gentleness. A gentleness that with great subtlety shows their fragility, their pain, their doubts, in stunning contrasts supported by a soundtrack that propounds this claustrophobic atmosphere, where there's no escape from oneself, nor from the other, for better or for worse.

Bagne, therefore, is but a mirror of ourselves dreaming of liberty, of unlocking the grids that protect and confine us, of loosing our bonds to finally soar outside the cage

*“The first BAGNE was a huge success with audiences and this completely re-worked second version is just as seductive.”*

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**“Le corps épris” (The body smitten)**

by Élie Castiel

October 22, 2015

**Two names, Pierre-Paul Savoie and Jeff Hall. Common denominator: modern choreographers. Proposal: to reinvent the art of movement.**

To make the mythic work that is BAGNE contemporary, they had to deconstruct it then infuse a new postmodernism that is free, open, beyond the purely aesthetic dogmas and prejudices, while highlighting the male body in its multiple transformations. At the same time, they had to give BAGNE a kind of sustainability, neither romantic nor nostalgic but within a new unclassifiable era of modern dance where choreographers have free rein to create freely and openly.

The choreography of BAGNE re-création (this time for men, 22 years after its female version featuring Sarah Williams and Carole Courtois) is athletic and draws on the occult workings of circus and theatre. The dance is more corporal, more physical, even metaphysical as its emotional and immersive sharing draws the audience into a kind of complicity. Thus BAGNE is first and foremost a sensorial experience where the human body meets its animal side, physically confronts it, unites, battles back and forth and resumes its initial form.

Two dancers, Lael Stellick and Milan Panet-Gigon, brothers, enemies, prisoners, lovers, friends, stage creatures, genuine aerial champions that don't think the body but master it, who offer a new narrative meaning that is unearthly, ethereal, associative. To make this duo plausible, there is Bernard Falaise's soundtrack which spurs the possibilities, juxtaposing the dancers' movements, tossing a joyously aphrodisiac perfume over them, or at least attraction, rejection, desire.

The stage set features metal everywhere, metal that proclaims rage and desperation along with a dose of strangeness and transient humanity. The prison world is uncompromising, shameless, homoerotic, throbbing. Yet from the gravity of situations comes a marginal, bestial, sexual sensuality that wavers between the pleasure of transgressing the moment and of breaking free and fleeing.

All this is BAGNE re-création. The male body is not prohibited. It re-assumes its fundamental rights, able to approach the other, ultimately in its future place, whatever its fleeting impact

**BAGNE \*\*\*½**

By Pierre-Paul Savoie and Jeff Hall

Performances: October 22 to 24 and October 28 to 31, 2015 at 8PM  
Place des Arts (Cinquième salle).

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