

# Gangâ

*I am woman  
woman river  
fluid like woman  
I am life that passes  
woman that passes  
life and death*

*Zéno Bianu  
(Gangâ)*

The Ganges. An immense river, a river of myth, open to every murmur and every echo. A river matrix and river of memory. Leading us to venture into the very depths of the self - and to go beyond the self. A place of revelation and many metamorphoses.

Through gesture, voice and breath, *Gangâ* explores the intense femininity of the river in its ever-changing aspects of joy, sensitivity, meditation, mourning and melancholy, opening up and appealing to a desire for space.

Dense, at once tender and violent, peopled with skies and stars, lights and nights, with tawny blue. An open space, out of phase with the compass, where splendid spirits might unceasingly appear, bathing us in their light and enchanting us once more.

Where choreography, poetic writing and musical improvisation meet, *Gangâ*, a nomadic, multi-dimensional production, seeks to create an atmosphere and share a ritualistic fervour. Between East and West, silence and incantation, sequence after sequence, a pyramid of sand is created wherein time becomes vague and reality loses its hold.



# *Gangâ* from France to India

## Background to the creation of the piece

Following an invitation to India from the French Embassy in New Delhi, *Gangâ* is entering a new phase. The piece will be performed in several major towns for the Festival Bonjour India 2. This invitation follows the presentation in New Delhi of the creative process that culminated in *Gangâ* at the festival DanSe Dialogues in November 2011.

Like a river in metamorphosis, *Gangâ* has already made several stops in France. The first steps were staged in the Garage in the city of Rennes in France and on Réunion Island, before its first full performance on the Scène Nationale (the National Stage) in the town of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in March 2011. *Gangâ* was also adapted for open-air performance on the banks of the river Marne for the "Festival de l'Oh !"

For Brigitte Chataignier, staging this piece in India is an opportunity to explore a western viewpoint deeply influenced by Indian culture, and to anchor it in what is essentially its starting point. It brings together live performance with a human adventure, a network of partners working to bring out essential values conveyed not only by the Ganges, but in a wider sense, water itself, and also woman.

It is also an opportunity for related cultural and learning activities. Periods of exploration and residence in France as well as India, notably in Benares and Kerala, are being considered, to enable meetings and exchanges between French and Indian artistes.

*Gangâ* can be adapted in various ways. The production will vary according to whether it is performed inside or in the open air, by a river or on stage in a theatre, but will always be in harmony with its surroundings.



# Gangâ

a new production  
between France and India



Ph.©laurencine Lot

Brigitte Chataignier will adapt the poetry, music and dance of this choreographed piece for an Indian audience, and to new performance environments :

**THE DANCE:** The project is primarily a series of dances. The piece develops through the creation of feminine characters played according to the venue by one (the Ganges) to three dancers, the others being symbolic emanations or ramifications of the first, similar to the Yamuna. Each dancer will have a specific colour and role in the dramatic framework of the piece as a whole.

The physical exploration of gesture goes beyond the fluidity and detailed language of the Mohini Attam to explore cycles, time periods and contrasting climates. The body in its dance opens up multiple meanings with which the Ganges is connected.

*Gangâ* is also a rhythm. The body undulates, becomes water, creates a continuum and a circulation of gestures, then becomes immobile, disappears, before playing with signs, being inhabited with expressions.

**THE MUSIC:** In France, the composer Alain Kremski plays the piano and Asian singing bowls on stage. Besides this live music, there is also a soundtrack composed by Denis Gambiez that includes sounds of water and the Ganges. For the Bonjour India tour, Brigitte Chataignier is accompanied by the musician, Sandip Chatterjee, master of the santour, a powerfully evocative stringed instrument.

The instrument, played live, will bring to life the sounds, so that various “states” can be interpreted and open up musical prisms related to the dance and the play. The sound layers will be played in parallel to and alternate with a soundtrack that includes traces of Alain Kremski’s compositions, like a memory - a layer of overlapping signs.

**THE POEM:** The five-part poem *Gangâ* was written by Zéno Bianu especially for this piece. The poem was translated into English for performance in India by Sarah Bartlett, for performance in English, French or both languages, depending on the venue (for example French cultural centres or Indian festivals).

The text will be performed on stage by Nivedita Bhattacharjee.

**SET DESIGN:** Produced by Philippe Lacroix, it represents the ghât, the steps and the platform – and perhaps an altar dedicated to the divinity. The design will vary according to the venue, either in an interior performance space or in the open air. Depending on the staging and **Sylvie Garot’s lighting** design for the venues, a screen hung upstage will be used to project five views of water, like a close-up, taken from the film *Water/Gangâ* by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Viswanadhan. A new level of buried memory.





Following training since childhood in mime, theatre and contemporary dance, **Brigitte Chataignier's** career took a new turn when, in 1986, she discovered and fell in love with the *Mohini Attam*, a traditional southern Indian dance form that had come close to being lost by the start of the 20th century. She studied the dance for seven years in Kerala under several masters, notably Kkm Leelamma, Kkm Ksheimavathy and Smt Sridevi. . She has received grants from ICCR, the Indo-French Cultural Exchange, and Sanskriti (AFAA).

Since then she has divided her time between India and France. In 1995, with Michel Lestréhan, she founded the *Companie Prana*, based in the city of Rennes. Her approach combines tradition and modernity, and includes research on the conservation of a cultural heritage, as well as new productions. She has danced the *Mohini Attam* in major festivals in India including the Soorya Festival and Bonjour India, as well as in Paris at the Théâtre de la Ville, the Guimet Museum and the La Villette exhibition centre.

She is recognised by the ICCR, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, as empanel artist in Mohini Attam, and in November 2012, performed for Kerala Sangeeth Natak Academy.

Brigitte Chataignier is also deeply involved in her own contemporary dance productions as a dancer and choreographer. These include several collaborations with the poet Zéno Bianu, for example *La Chambre des Vertiges (The Vertigo Room)* in 2002, *Elémentaire (Elemental)* in 2005, and *Gopika*, in 2009. In 2007 she co-produced with Adoor Gopalakrishnan a feature-length documentary *The Dance of the Enchantress*.

*Gangâ*, her latest choreographic project, was first staged at the Saint Quentin Theatre in the district of Yvelines, in France. In November 2011, she presented the stages of the new production of *Gangâ* at the DanSe dialogues event organised by the French Embassy in New Delhi.



Zéno Bianu, one of the signatories of the “Electric Manifesto” in the 1970s, has written a wide range of works that examine poetry, theatre and the Orient. His writings, published notably by the publishing houses Gallimard and Actes Sud Papiers, echo the work of such great artistic outsiders as Antonin Artaud, Van Gogh, Chet Baker and John Coltrane. As a man of the theatre, his plays and adaptations have been performed at the Avignon Festival and at the Odeon-Theatre of Europe. Familiar with the poetry of the East, he is the author of a remarkable book about Krishnamurti, and has compiled two anthologies of Haiku poetry.

# PRESS REVIEWS

Brigitte Chataignier, a prominent figure in traditional Indian dance, took her inspiration from the river Ganges for her new piece "Gangâ." An accomplished specialist in mohini attam, a gentle, flowing, undulating dance style from the Kerala region in south-western India, she blends movement, poetry and live music to evoke a series of images of the Ganges.

Thousands of people come together on the shores of the river to bathe, to wash their clothes and to make offerings to the gods. The sacred river is a way of life that the choreographer wanted to celebrate through a dance form that incorporates the impeccable beauty inherent in mohini attam.

Rosita Boisseau



**Production :** Compagnie Prana, Festival de l'OH ! (General Council of the Val de Marne). Artist in residence St. Quentin-en-Yvelines Theatre/National Stage (2011)

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