

**Brigel Gjoka, Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit  
& Ruşan Filiztek**

**in collaboration with William Forsythe**

# **Neighbours**



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## KEY CONTACTS

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*Credit: Brian Ca*



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**Neighbours**

**Brigel Gjoka, Rauf “RubberLegz” Yasit & Ruşan Filiztek**  
created in collaboration with William Forsythe

**A Sadler’s Wells Production**

**with the support of Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels**

*Co-produced with PACT Zollverein Essen, Pôle européen de création - Ministère de la Culture/Maison de la Danse Lyon, Biennale de la danse de Lyon 2021, Cndc Angers, TAP – Théâtre Auditorium de Poitiers, Sydney Festival, Festival d’Automne à Paris; Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse, La Filature, Scène nationale de Mulhouse, Julidans Amsterdam, Théâtre de Liège, MC2: Maison de la Culture de Grenoble, Teatro municipal do Porto, KDF / Kalamata Dance Festival, Torinodanza Festival / Teatro Stabile di Torino - Teatro Nazionale and centre chorégraphique national de Caen en Normandie.*

**Choreographers and performers:** Brigel Gjoka & Rauf “RubberLegz” Yasit

**Created in collaboration with** William Forsythe

**Composer & Musician:** Ruşan Filiztek, Accords Croisés

**Lighting Designer:** Zeynep Kepekli

**Costume Designer:** Ryan Dawson Laight

Part I World Premiere: 29 & 30 November 2019 at PACT Zollverein, Essen, Germany.

Developed piece World Premiere: 3 & 4 March 2022 at CNDC Angers, France.



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## **BROCHURE & WEB COPY**

Neighbours

Brigel Gjoka, Rauf “RubberLegz” Yasit & Ruşan Filiztek  
created in collaboration with William Forsythe

Neighbours is a raw, powerful collaboration by two extraordinary artists each from a distinct movement and cultural heritage.

Pioneering abstract b-boy Rauf “RubberLegz” Yasit and established contemporary dancer Brigel Gjoka were inspired by their time on William Forsythe’s A Quiet Evening of Dance. Both at the cutting edge of their disciplines, they’ve created a work that brings together their diverse expertise and draws influence from their Kurdish and Albanian roots.

A new choreographic language forms as they examine moments of transformation and contemplation at the crossroads of urban, classical and contemporary dance. Through their shared experience a simple truth emerges, that dance is part of being human.

## **PRESS QUOTES**

“A work of art. We can’t wait for the second part!”  
**Danser Canal Historique**

★★★★★ “Extraordinary b-boy Rauf ‘RubberLegz’ Yasit”  
**The Guardian, UK (on A Quiet Evening of Dance)**

★★★★★ “In Dialogue Brigel Gjoka and the feather-footed Riley Watts romp through a casual-seeming duet in which moves are repeatedly shared, copied and bettered with insouciant bravura”  
**The Financial Times, UK (on A Quiet Evening of Dance)**



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### Available images & photography

- Part I production photos © Brian Ca

### Available trailer & digital content

- Rehearsal trailer (60 secs)

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### Production trailer edit **MUST** include:

#### **Text:**

Neighbours

Brigel Gjoka, Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit & Ruşan Filiztek

created in collaboration with William Forsythe

A Sadler's Wells Production with the support of Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels

#### **Logo:**

Sadler's Wells secondary logo, Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels logo  
(logos available for download)



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## ADDITIONAL COPY

Below is an alternate copy, prepared by Karthika Nair, that may be suitable for some audiences.

### English version

For a piece that opens in silence, *Neighbours* is – unexpectedly, ebulliently – chatty. Elbows exchange fireside stories, joust and frolic. Arms intertwine, rebutting, remembering, rejoicing. Knees and hips angle and unfold into intricate, unspoken patter. Generations of memory surface in the graze of fingers on a shoulder.

Inspired by a suggestion from William Forsythe during the making of *A Quiet Evening of Dance*, Brigel Gjoka & Rauf Yasit began improvising kinetic patterns together. They delve into the overlap of movement languages inherited through folk dances and communal celebrations, Albanian for one, Kurdish for the other. They explore how these histories pivot through the distinct experiences of each – specifically, ballet and contemporary dance for Brigel; b-breaking, improvisation, design & animation for Rauf – only to intersect, to transform when they meet. For dance, they remind us, is not a product: it is part of the human process. Statutory warning: *When it is, there will be joy*. One that is blessedly infectious.

### French version

Pour un spectacle qui démarre en silence, *Neighbours* s'avère – étonnamment, allègrement – loquace. Des coudes se livrent des joutes, s'éclatent, échangent des anecdotes. Des bras s'entrelacent — en discussion vive, en réminiscences, en liesse. Genoux et hanches se plient et se déplient, tout un dialogue tacite et complexe, incessant. Le frôlement des doigts sur une épaule fait surgir une couvée de souvenirs ancestrales.

Pendant la création de la pièce *A Quiet Evening of Dance* en 2018, William Forsythe avait demandé à Brigel Gjoka et Rauf Yasit d'improviser ensemble, de tenter certains motifs cinétiques. Portés par son intuition, ils ont poursuivi leur dialogue pour en arriver ici, à *Neighbours*, où ils mettent en exergue le chevauchement des langages corporels hérités de danses folkloriques et de festivités communautaires, albanaises pour l'un et kurdes pour l'autre. Ils puisent dans leurs propres trajectoires, chacune si distinctive : Brigel issu du ballet et de la danse contemporaine alors que Rauf, prodige autodidacte de b-breaking, pratique également le design et l'animation. Ce qu'ils y trouvent est quelque chose de remarquable, un espace rare au croisement de ces héritages partagés et de leurs passifs individuels. Quelque chose qui nous rappelle que la danse n'est pas un « produit fini », elle fait partie du processus humain. Avis aux spectateurs : *Il y aura de la joie*. Une joie sacrément contagieuse.

**PROGRAMME NOTE****Home and Away****By Karthika Nair**

June 2021

*This essay is provided here for reference about the work, and may also be reproduced in programmes. Please note that the author must be credited in any uses.*

For a piece that seems to open in silence, *Neighbours* is – unexpectedly, ebulliently – chatty. Elbows exchange fireside stories, jut and joust, frolic. Arms intertwine, over and over, rebutting, rejoicing. Knees and hips angle and unfold into intricate, unspoken, patter. Generations of memory surface in the graze of fingers on a shoulder. Speaking of fingers, parleys are being held by twenty swift, skittish ones. Temples conjoin to resemble a joyful, double-headed squid, then disconnect. Elbows take over once again, swivel and knot.

Watching Brigel Gjoka and Rauf “RubberLegz” Yasit from one end of a studio at the Maison de la danse in Lyon, I feel slightly lightheaded as wave after wave of sensations surge and ebb.

First gratitude, the gratitude of being swept up in a world of pure movement once more. A world complete in itself, absorbing, unmediated by screens, digital interfaces or broadband networks. A world seemingly devoid of technology where the flesh is flesh – vocal, sensual, *and* cerebral – and unmarked by pixels. Where two bodies can be in eloquent, profound conversation with nothing else – not even the elements meant to frame performance, like sets or lighting – colouring the immediacy of the experience nor the intimacy of communion.

The rapt mutual attention exuded by Brigel and Rauf draws me in. As a viewer I feel invited, warmly ushered into the world of *Neighbours*. I get the uncanny impression that entire throngs move, unseen, behind and within the two men. As though invisible clans have gathered for a long-awaited celebration, as though they greet me, with amity, some curiosity, much relish. Imagined though the clans may be, Brigel and Rauf’s delight is palpable.

When we finally settle down for a *spoken* conversation, my questions do not flow in a structured, journalistic mode. They have been scrambled by all the impressions jostling in my head. What made them, I ask first, choose this particular title? To retrace their path to the decision, they return to William Forsythe’s *Quiet Evening of Dance*, where it all began, where they met, where Forsythe asked them to develop “patterns of coming together” as Rauf put it. “Rauf was new to all of us, and we observed each other,” recalls Brigel. “We had all these tasks to do. So while Bill observed us, we both made new versions of an existing pattern, to the music he was playing. We didn’t know what that duet meant then, but Bill broke in and said, ‘These guys have something to say to each other.’”

That “something” would develop subsequently through months of rehearsal and “continuous dialogue” across two years of touring *Quiet Evening...* Rauf says “The more we did, the more we discovered each other. At first, we responded to Forsythe’s outside gaze and directions. Now, we respond to each other differently, from within.” This long time together has led them to respond, with complete freedom “to the nothingness, the lack of a third gaze.” Brigel points out that everything had to grow from their equation with each other, since there were

none of the usual thematic or musical doorposts. Instead of looking at an artistic spark to start things, it was the human connection that acted as spur.

The word *Neighbours* then sprang up, spontaneously. A word that implies home, lots of similarity, and some difference. Or, as Rauf defines it, a bond “a little more than a friendship” – with a shared space and history, and a tradition of watching out for each other – while more formal, respectful, than within a family: “Our fathers came from adjoining lands, and with the Albanian friends I grew up around, we used to say, *we are like neighbours*.” Working together, they have been delving into shared reflections of cultural heritage, familial salutes, the teasing one-upmanship between friends

“There are gestures, for instance, the arm holding the shoulder,” which they both remember from their childhood, but as Brigel emphasises, “We talked about it. We wanted to bring in colours, notions, not to spell out, ‘this is a folk step’. It’s a live journey that reflects our own.” Rauf expands, “We are not 24x7 in a monoculture. We listen to American music, but also Albanian music. We may go to a wedding, but also a club or a bar... So even if your roots are from there and you are proud of it, but you also know other languages, other cultures: that is the experience we are bringing here.”

And the next phase of the creative journey will see another neighbour, Turkish-French composer and musician Rusan Filiztek join them, add one more voice to the conversation. Brigel speaks of how they felt hearing Rusan’s music: “It was obvious we were in the same waters, the connection was immediate... we could imagine how the music would *look* in family gatherings, it was the music of the posture, the character, the tonality, the situation. You could put the music, and people would just live it. We heard it and thought, *that’s* what we need.”

I am curious what they found challenging about this duet. Nothing, they both emphasise, with the act of moving, working, itself. The catch lay elsewhere, in approach, for instance. Brigel elaborates, “It’s hard to put into words, but we started with our respect for each other and the eagerness to know what we can do together, without the purpose of tutoring the other... Rauf works more with one dance partner, I, usually, with a group of people. I find it hard to choreograph for (just) one person. I am used to improvising more, and keep changing things.”

Rauf, meanwhile, explains that as an abstract b-boy (and a designer), he works with a clear foundation; he writes, researches and blueprints the work beforehand: “I look for one idea, usually have a cinematic approach to things. But there came a point when I said, it can be anything, (we) don’t have to perform the way we have been trained or are used to, or what works.” They look at *Neighbours* as an exploration because, Brigel reiterates, “the purpose of making something together is *making something together*, not the way I want it or he wants it. If it were, it wouldn’t be a collaboration, we’d be making monologues.” And Rauf completes the thought, “What I look for is the growth, it’s like learning a new language in a new country. You can speak English, but you can also learn a new language, and through that, a new culture.”

Perhaps that is why, while watching from my vantage point in the studio a little earlier, another thought had struck me: this is a story of polyglot bodies with polyglot memories. For there are many languages at play here, languages emerging from an entire library of

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memories, some ancestral, some recent. There is the overlap of movement languages inherited through folk dances and communal festivities, Albanian for Brigel, Kurdish for Rauf — yes, the unseen crowds I felt in the energy, the puckishness generated on the dance floor.

And all through the making of *Neighbours*, the two dancer-choreographers tell me, they are essentially exploring how these histories pivot through the distinct experiences of each — specifically, ballet, contemporary dance with improvisation for Brigel; b-breaking, design and animation for Rauf — only to intersect, to transform when they meet. How “each time our history comes with us, our geography comes with us” — and the act of conjuring up the past becomes a shared tribute to the journeys that have brought them to this moment, each distinct, but similar. For dance, they remind me, like life, is not a product: it is part of the human process.

Unsurprising then, that when asked what they would like the piece to do, the answer comes in unison: convey their own joy, through the entire period of making *Neighbours*, to the audience. “Not think, just enjoy,” Brigel concludes.

Joy, indeed, is a word I will hear, over and over, the next day, from viewers who attend the showing at the Biennale de la danse: a motley crowd comprising professionals from all over Europe, high-schoolers in the city, senior citizens from nearby suburbs, long-standing regulars at the festival, and new volunteers... A joy, it transpires, that is blessedly infectious.



Credit: Brian Ca

**ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES****Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit**

Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit is a Los Angeles based dancer, choreographer, director and visual artist with Kurdish roots who was born and raised in Celle, Germany.

He has worked with William Forsythe, National Opera of Paris, USC, CalArts, LACMA, Nike RT, Burberry, Arashi, Puma, Sadler's Wells, Flying Steps, CNDC Angers, Red Bull, Muscle Milk, Moderat, Sony, Sonos, Feat, WAD MAG, Tumi, HP, Pandora, Pfadfinderei, Art Factory International, Bodytraffic and more.

Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit has a style that defies categorisation, he has created his own unique movement language and has developed it over a number of years.

Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit is a multi-disciplined tour de force. He received his diploma in 3D-Vizualisation and Animation in Switzerland and has years of experience working in professional design agencies as visual artist.

**Brigel Gjoka**

Brigel Gjoka, choreographer teacher and professional stage dancer. His artistic work engagements have taken him around the world to more than 31 countries.

Brigel was born in Albania and trained in Tirana Ballet School 1997-2004. He was a member of Cannes Jeune Ballet during his studies 2004-2006 at the Ecole Superieure de Danse de Cannes-Mougins.

In 2006 he was engaged by the Ballet De L'opera National Du Rhin, where he had the opportunity to perform different roles and work with choreographers from the international dance scene.

Wanting to expand his vision, he joined Staatstheater Mainz in 2009 for one season, then joined the Nederlands Dans Theater in 2010.

In January 2011 he became a member of the The Forsythe Company, where he participated in new creations by William Forsythe and performed a wide range of Forsythe's repertory until the closure of the company in 2015. In 2015, he was part of "Life in Progress," the farewell world tour of Sylvie Guillem, traveling and performing Forsythe's DUO2015 around the world.

For this production, with Riley Watts, he was awarded the Leonide Massine prize in the Positano premia la danza, Italy, for dancer of the year on the contemporary dance scene.

Brigel has choreographed Evo-Revolution for the Cannes Jeune Ballet (2009); the installation Front to Confront with Leggere Strutture Company, supported by Tonino Lamborghini (2012); SWTH for Maggio Danza Italy and RECRECiT for Kwang Tung Dance Company Malaysia (2013); SYNC with Hector Solari for Staatstheater Passau and BMW (2013); Eksod with Leggere Strutture Italy (2014); for National Academy of Performing Arts Karachi, Among Fog (2015), and Hotel Propaganda (2017) where he participated in the International Dance & Theater Festival Karachi; and DELEGATET for the Theater Vorpommern Germany (2016).

In September 2016 he performed DUO2015 by William Forsythe at the Eighth Annual Anne d'Harnoncourt Symposium at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Since January 2014 Brigel has been artistic director of the Art Factory International Bologna. Since 2015, he has been the artistic curator of Albanian Institute New York and correspondent of the Institute in Berlin, Germany.

As a lecturer and teacher, Gjoka has worked in Italy, Switzerland, France, China, Denmark, Greece, Albania, Germany, Malaysia, China, Singapore, Australia, and Japan. He teaches dance and choreography workshops based on his own work and inspired by William Forsythe and The Forsythe Company. In 2019 he creates Neighbours with Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit.



### **Ruşan Filiztek**

Ruşan Filiztek is a contemporary and traditional composer, musician and singer from Istanbul, currently living in Paris, France.

Ruşan moved to Paris in 2015 to complete a masters degree in musicology at the University of Sorbonne, where he now teaches Balkan and Oriental music and is completing his PHD.

A specialist in songs and melodies from Anatolia and Mesopotamia, Ruşan spent several years travelling to research and deepen his knowledge of music from a broad range of backgrounds. While spending time in the Middle East, Caucasia, Siberia and Asia he forged bonds with local musicians who have helped him to enrich his repertoire.

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He has performed with the Paris Philharmonie, and collaborated with renowned musicians Kaboul Bamako on an album, Jordi Savall on his project Orpheus XXI and Gabriel Kerdonkuff. He has also composed for film, working on Diam with French Film Director Tony Gatlif in 2016. In 2020 he signed with Accords Croisés, releasing his first solo album Sans Souci in 2021, and is currently preparing his next record.



*Credit: Brian Ca*



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## **ABOUT SADLER'S WELLS**



Sadler's Wells is a world-leading creative organisation based in London committed to the making of dance, with over three centuries of theatrical heritage. Since 2005, Sadler's Wells has created award-winning dance productions, co-productions and touring projects in collaboration with its portfolio of Associate Artists, as well as international dance companies and partners.

These include Russell Maliphant's multi award-winning production PUSH with Sylvie Guillem; Crystal Pite's Polaris with Thomas Adès; Gravity Fatigue, directed by fashion designer Hussein Chalayan; Sutra by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and sculptor Antony Gormley; Michael Keegan-Dolan's Swan Lake/ Loch na hEala; productions by Carlos Acosta's company Acosta Danza; Natalia Osipova's Pure Dance; Botis Seva's Olivier Award winning BLKDOG and William Forsythe's A Quiet Evening of Dance.

Sadler's Wells plays a significant role in the development of dance, bringing innovative and inspiring works to worldwide audiences. In the last 15 years, it has created 56 productions that have been enjoyed by over 2.2 million people in 48 countries. Sadler's Wells productions have toured to some of the most prestigious theatres and festivals around the world, such as the Sydney Opera House, the Lincoln Center's White Light Festival in New York, the National Centre for Performing Arts in Beijing, Chekhov International Theatre Festival in Moscow and Santiago a mil Festival in Chile.

In 2020, Sadler's Wells premiered Message In A Bottle, a Sadler's Wells and Universal Music UK production by Kate Prince, based on the songs of Sting. In 2021 The Rite of Spring and common ground[s] received its world premiere, in partnership with the Pina Bausch Foundation and Ecole des Sables.

*"If you could pick up a dance piece, turn it inside out and look at the label, the words 'Made at Sadler's Wells' would be a guarantee of quality. Since 2005, the north London theatre has been a hotbed of dance creativity, commissioning and supporting some of the world's finest choreographers to make work". The Scotsman*