

Square Root

Solo for one b-girl

Production 2007 | 25 min

>> 2nd prize of the 2009 Masdanza Contemporary
Choreography Contest Masdanza 2009

COMPAGNIE
PAR TERRE
ANNE NGUYEN



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A word from the choreographer	2
Extracts from the <i>Manual of the City Warrior</i>	4
Choreographer: Anne Nguyen	6
Cast	7
Press extracts	8
Video teaser of the performance	8
Partners	9
Booking information	9



par Terre / Anne Nguyen Dance Company
Correspondence address: 113 rue Saint-Maur – 75011 PARIS
Registered office: 145 bis rue Chéret - 94000 CRETEIL
SIRET: 484 553 391 00034 - APE: 9001Z - Licence entrepreneur de spectacles: 2-1066967
Tel. + 33 (0)6 15 59 82 28 – production@compagnieparterre.com - www.compagnieparterre.com

Square Root

≡ A word from the choreographer

M

y dance transgresses movement. My feet are sucked into the concrete. The cement blocks around me try to mould me to their image. I'm submerged by the crowd, it engulfs and carries me along the streets." Set to an original composition for cello, punctuated by poems embedding breakdance into the contemporary urban universe, Anne Nguyen reveals the mathematical function she uses to transform the circular ritual of breakdance on contact with the stage:
Square Root



© Philippe Gramard

"The solo *Square Root* is the result of choreographic research into the geometry of hip hop dance within the performance space. Why? Because breakdance is dance form that was born inside a circle and meant to be danced in a circular manner, facing in no specific direction. How to convey the integrity of this dance form to the square space of the stage, without making it a mere transposition, and without undermining the movements and energy?"

Symbolically, the transposition and adaptation of forms relate also to the notion of culture. The daughter of a Vietnamese father and a Franco-Spanish mother, I am the embodiment of the East, which has put its faith in the West. I do not speak Vietnamese. Whenever I see the Vietnamese flag in the dictionary, the image immediately fades from my memory. I have never been to Vietnam, I do not know if I will ever go. Where are my roots? I try to find them through dance... But in order to show them on stage, I must express myself through *culture*. And that *culture* is a concept, a mathematical function, and that function is none other than the square root.

Why *Square Root*? Because first and foremost, I was formatted by the urban environment in which I grew up. As a result of living among boxes and cubes from the moment I was born, my naturally circular movement has developed right angles. While seeking to define myself, I discovered breakdance, a dance built from urban forms and movements confined within a circle. The *Square Root* of the circle is the square.

In my solo, I begin by bowing down to the Earth, and paying homage to all four corners of the stage. Immediately I lift my head, I am faced with choosing a direction. Whether to go towards the square to become a part of it, or towards the circle, to try and escape? I use three cubes, which I propel, align or assemble into combinations. Sometimes they symbolize chairs, where I can be seated and where I finally find my place... At first, my dance is directed by my head touching the ground. It is then dominated by my feet, which interrupt the circular motion at right angles. It becomes mathematical, then animal. Finally, I remove my shoes to erase everything, to try and let the dance flow like a meandering river...

I decided to dance to cello music because of its inner, organic voice. I used to play the cello as a child. No need for a beat, for it already resonates within my dance... I had my poems read aloud to the melody of the cello by a soft, intimate, feminine voice. My poems talk of dance, the earth, geometrical forms, and of being confined within the urban environment... They guide my thoughts and my progress across the stage, they represent my inner being.

When I first started devising compositions, I tried writing down sentences and mathematical formulae on a blackboard. Then the blackboard was split up into slates. In the end, I chose to symbolize my ideas with the forms created by the dance itself. That dance tries to build movement within the space inside the three cubes. Those cubes could almost be the remains of a monument erected on stage, or the fragments of my own shell...

In *Square Root*, my dance goes way beyond Breakdance. I am half-human, half-animal, a being whose movements are transformed by thought. I try to break down my movements to the bare minimum, in order to reconnect with the original urge to move... and then rebuild them inside the performance space, incorporating the different constraints of an environment at conflict with the dance..."

Anne Nguyen



Square Root

≡ Extracts from the Manual of the City Warrior

Poems by Anne Nguyen, recorded on the soundtrack

CIRCLE

"All circular things must submit to the Great Operation before entering the structure. For while circles roll, squares can be placed and stashed with optimum density of stackability. But my architectural, object-driven mind is drawn to the storage concept, keeping circles only for mechanical or thermodynamical transformation: wheels, disks and ball pen points undo miles, data and ink; pipes, hobs rings and light bulbs echo in shape the physical reactions unfolding within. To build my civilised world, inert circles are carved into squares, and those reproducing the living are boxed into the entity.

At a time when the cube-shaped tree is shut out from the class of the living, I use my moves' dynamics to break away from the list of objects waiting to be formatted. With my square built not within me but around me, I rotate freely in the orbit that binds me to the cycle of nature.

But I refuse to be confined to mere rotation. To break the bounds of my encasement and tear my cage away from the translation, I dance in a circle, to complete the natural revolution."

CHAIR FREEZE

"The most criminal acts are committed on chairs.

The system's connectics beckon me into the structure. Taking up my seat involves inserting my digestive tube exit into the seat-like receptacle awaiting fertilization. I am enthroned like an organ poised for procreation of the supporting organism.

Sitting down makes my center of gravity shift from inside my body to the seat. Versed in the act of submission to the equipment, I reject animal postures to embrace civilisation. In my mind, positions of discomfort are points of elevation.

To escape alienation, I spring away from seated power. On my metro seat, I refuse to cross my legs. I move to the front and plant my feet into the ground, legs apart, ready to leap. I disregard the realities of the seated stance by opting for a squatting dance.

My freezes are chairs. I set them down to show I have my own props between me and the floor."



© Jesús Robisco

BREAK

“My dance transgresses movement. My feet are sucked up by the concrete. The cement blocks around me try to mould me in their image. I’m submerged by the crowd, it engulfs and steers me along the streets.

Drifting with the linear tide, I take control of my center of gravity. I dive to the tarmac, beneath the surface where other people move around. My freedom awaits me in the space built for legs and feet. I fold myself up and climb inside, to finally shake off the laws that govern the surface.

Close to the asphalt, where I live, my body’s my own at last. My energy is channeled into a tighter spot, and the power of my moves is magnified. My body becomes a compact ball, which I bounce against the concrete. Now, with no bottom or top, no hands or feet, I cannot fall any more. Falling becomes a controllable mode of locomotion.

I tap my energy from under the surface; I can re-emerge in the current without being swept away.”

RIGTH ANGLES

“I was spawned by a box. The box is still there, partly open, in its place with the rest. I stand up on other boxes, watching it from on top. I cannot destroy it, so I try to describe it.

I copy the city and the cubes that compose it to make them more my own. I dress my curve-like body in straight-cut clothes. I build my dance out of angles, with edges that cut razor-sharp. I describe my memory of my box and my fight to break free.

In the laws of architecture, freezes* hold easiest when they are shaped in right angles. I spin best on my head with my feet flexed. My body is made of pulleys and cables that I must tighten and tauten. I make my footworks* draw circles that pass through points of definition. I often switch my focal point, so I am never confined. The only reason I build boxes is to be able to get out.

My parallel world is also perpendicular.”

**freezes: acrobatic breakdance poses.*

**footworks: floor dance moves in breakdance (legs moving around the hands, which support the weight).*



Square Root

≡ Choreographer: Anne Nguyen



As a dancer specialized in breakdance and familiar with the world of hip-hop battles, Anne Nguyen founded the par Terre Dance Company in 2005. The scientific thought as well as her practice of several martial arts inspire her to conceive choreographic universes that sublimate the hip-hop dance and its essence. By setting precise gestures, geometrical constraints, energy and density contrasts, intertwining of bodies and dance mechanisms, and unexpected occupations of space, she combines a raw, accomplished hip-hop dance with a graphic, pure, deconstructed choreographic writing. Her choreographic pieces display a complex, precise architecture and alternate between controlled spaces prompting personal interpretations and spaces left to chance, or calling for improvisation, which can be fraught with risks. With architectural geometric declinations in *Square Root*, uninterrupted flow of dance particles in continual transformation in *PROMENADE OBLIGATOIRE*, robotic partition of revisited couple dances in *bal.exe*, games of strategy in pursuit of territory in *Autarcie (...)*, variant of the breakdance in the form of martial arts in *Kata*, her creations reflect the forms and energies that surround human beings in the contemporary world. They combine poetry and mathematics, sensuality and explosiveness. They explore the links between music and dance, through original musical creations and a reflection on the dancer's relationship to music and time. Through her choreographic creations, Anne Nguyen questions the value given to the observer and the connection between individuals. She likes to create new relationships between the audience and dance, which she implements through hybrid projects like *Dance of the city warriors*, a course of participative and immersive installations crossing hip-hop dance with the world of video and virtual reality, or with *Graphic Cyphers*, an immersive choreographic concept for the public space.

Anne Nguyen is currently working with more than thirty hip-hop dancers with different specialities (breakdance, popping and waacking) on her different touring productions, and she herself performs in several of them such as *Racine Carrée* and *Yonder Woman*. Anne Nguyen's first production, the solo *Square Root* (2007) relates the geometry found in breakdance movements to the contemporary urban environment. It combines mathematical dance compositions with some of Anne's poems. The solo won second prize in the Masdanza contemporary choreography competition in 2009. Anne Nguyen also choreographed *Keep it Funky!* (2007), a celebratory piece devised for six lockers, and *Spirit of the Underground* (2008), a performance for five dancers and one actress, on the themes of contact and dreams. Her duet *Yonder Woman* (2010), an "experiment for two superhero women", analyses the notion of performance through a game-play based on linear progress and relationship behaviours. Her 2012 production *PROMENADE OBLIGATOIRE* is a one-hour walk for eight poppers, who undertake an uninterrupted crossing along the timeline, in an exploration of the different possible states of "being together". In Anne's 2013 production for quartet *Autarcie (...)*, she explores the inner workings of a restless "tribe", with all the power struggles that ensue. In her 2014 production *bal.exe*, a "mechanical ball set to chamber music" for eight poppers and five classical musicians, robotic dancers engage into a new "mechanical" dance style performed in pairs, called "looping pop". Anne Nguyen staged the duet *Lettres à Zerty* in 2015 as part of a commission for young audiences by CDC Le Gymnase and CDC Le Cuvier. In October 2016, Anne Nguyen created *Dance of the city warriors*, an immersive, participatory course of installations centered on hip-hop dance, implementing live video capture and editing interactive video processes and performances danced in situ. In October 2017, Anne Nguyen will stage *Kata*, a show for eight breakdancers that lends form to the warrior-like energy of breakdance. The movements are decomposed into sequences of linear moves and evolve into genuine fights played. She is planning to stage a new production in 2019.



Dancer and choreographer of the par Terre Dance Company, Anne Nguyen is first and foremost a B-girl, specialising in hip-hop floorworks. She has performed with many hip-hop and contemporary dance companies such as Black Blanc Beur, Faustin Linyekula and Salia Ni Seydou. She formed part of the breakdance crews RedMask in Montreal, as well as Phase T, Def Dogz and Créteil Style in Paris, and has taken part in hundreds of battles, either solo or in groups, winning several high-profile competitions, such as IBE 2004 or BOTY 2005. She has served as judge on many others, including BOTY 2006 and Redbull BC One 2007. She makes an appearance in the documentary film *Planet B-Boy* (2007).

Anne Nguyen also writes poetry, short prose items and articles on dance (*Danser* magazine, *Repères*, *cahier de danse*). Excerpts from her collection of poems, the *Manual of the City Warrior*, have been published in *Graffiti!* magazine, on which she was chief editor of the dance section. Several pieces performed by the Dance Company incorporate Anne Nguyen's texts, recorded or spoken (*Square Root*, *Spirit of the Underground*). Anne teaches hip-hop dance using a method based on postures, on the deconstruction of dance moves and on their subsequent deployment within the performance space. Since 2012, she has taught a technical and theoretical workshop on hip-hop dance at the University of Sciences Po Paris, called *Hip-hop, a contemporary culture*.

Keen on collaborating and cross-referencing within artistic milieux, Anne Nguyen created in 2014 the piece *i* as part of the trilogy for six dancers and three choreographers *La preuve par l'autre* commissioned by the Malka Dance Company. She has also worked as choreographic consultant to Australian choreographer Nick Power, in Sydney, for his 2014 production *Cypher*.

Anne Nguyen was awarded the 2013 SACD Nouveau Talent Chorégraphie prize and appointed Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2015.

“With a scientific background, Anne Nguyen puts hip-hop movement through the mill to extract spectacular equations, uncluttered yet always surprising. A love of constraints and a passion to sublimate them: typical Nguyen.”

Rosita Boisseau - Le Monde Magazine (13 April 2012)

≡ Cast

Choreographer:	Anne Nguyen
Dancer:	Anne Nguyen
<u>Music (original creation)</u>	
Composer and cellist:	Raphaële Murer
Poems:	Anne Nguyen
Narrator:	Bérangère Nicolle
In collaboration with:	Faustin Linyekula
Lighting designer:	Laurent Vérité
Costume designer:	Claire Schwartz

Composer and cellist: RAPHAËLE MURER

Raphaële Murer discovered the cello at a very young age, and entered the Strasbourg Conservatory of Music where she received a full musical education. Drawn to contemporary music, she took part several times in the Musica Festival in Strasbourg. She then continued her musical studies in Paris, and experimented with various musical styles, as well as other artistic forms of expression. Raphaële is a member of the French chanson group called *La Blanche*, and accompanies the singer, Emmanuelle Cadoret. She has also worked with the actor, Vincent Barraut, for whom she composed some stage music.



“Accompanied by a serial piece for the cello, the choreographer puts to music her fluent and beautiful movements and endows them with a monologue of a dark, pulsing density. (...)”

(Roger Salas - El Pais – 25/10/2009)

Square Root

≡ Press extracts

El Pais - Roger Salas (25 October 2009)

"Square Root borders on brilliance, taking elements from breakdance and elevating them to a sophisticated, superior aesthetic plane. Accompanied by a serial piece for the cello, the choreographer puts to music her fluent and beautiful movements and endows them with a monologue of a dark, pulsing density."

Télérama Sortir - Rosita Boisseau (1 June 2011)

"[Anne Nguyen] creates a geometrical game on the empty stage set to demonstrate the principles of hip hop: how to transpose the original hip hop circle into a square; and how to extract its vital substance? The result is, as ever, astute and compelling, the vision of an artist intent on ridding hip hop of its clichés."

La Terrasse - Nathalie Yokel (February 2012)

"*Square Root* is the solo piece that made Anne Nguyen first known to the public: a young woman who was as much a mathematician as a dancer, as much an author of prose as of choreographic pieces finely woven around unpretentious hip-hop moves."

≡ Video teaser

Square Root - par Terre / Anne Nguyen Dance Company

Teaser of *Square Root*

>> [Watch](#) (length: 3 min)



Square Root

≡ Partners

Coproduction: Initiatives d'Artistes en Danses Urbaines (Fondation de France - Parc de la Villette (Paris) - Fonds Social Européen); Centre National de la Danse - Pantin, for the Festival Danse Hip Hop Tanz; ADDM 22.

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Anne Nguyen is an associated artist to Chaillot - Théâtre national de la Danse from 2015 to 2018.

The par Terre Dance Company has been invited to take part in artist-in-residence programmes at l'Espace 1789 de Saint-Ouen (93) for the 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Anne Nguyen was awarded the 2013 SADC Nouveau Talent Chorégraphie prize and appointed Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2015.

≡ Booking information

Duration: 25 minutes

Technical requirements:

- * The props (three cube-shaped cushions) do not require any special transportation.
- * The piece can be performed outdoors, on a flat and smooth floor.

Touring staff: 3 persons (1 choreographer-dancer, 1 technician, 1 production assistant).

Booking fees: Available on request.

Technical rider: *Can be downloaded on www.compagnieparterre.com*



113 rue Saint-Maur - 75011 PARIS
+33 (0)6 15 59 82 28 | production@compagnieparterre.com
www.compagnieparterre.fr

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