

Daniel Linehan, la magie tranquille d'un corps qui écoute

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Photography by Eva Faché

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Daniel Linehan: The Quiet Magic of a Listening Body

On June 25 and 26, as part of the Festival de Marseille, the American dancer and choreographer presents *The Quiet Magic*, a duo created with Catalan dancer Victor Pérez Armero. A stripped-down, luminous piece that seeks tenderness rather than demonstration, listening rather than noise. Reflecting an artist whose journey, from Seattle to Brussels, has made silence and the relationships between people a form of resistance.

With his azure-blue eyes, well-defined features, and fine, wheat-colored hair, Daniel Linehan always seems like an eternal adolescent. The years pass, but his frank smile and his way of being present without ever seeking the spotlight retain something deeply youthful. Born in the United States and based in Brussels, the artist cultivates a certain discretion. An observer of the world and the people around him, he listens as much as he responds, weighing his words with precision. For him, the desire to share seems stronger than the desire to convince. Humble yet sincere, he cultivates a rare balance—this lightness that immediately puts people at ease without ever sacrificing depth.

The softness of his voice and his manner is not reserve. It is a way of inhabiting the world. Of approaching it with curiosity. For nearly twenty years, the choreographer has built a singular body of work where movement dialogues with speech, music, light, and sometimes video. A body of work that never seeks to impose answers but instead opens spaces, allowing the body to ask the questions that words cannot formulate.

Nature and Musical Theater

It all began in Olympia, Washington, in the northwestern United States. A human-scale city turned toward nature, rain, and forests, where young Daniel Linehan grew up. At ten years old, a summer performing arts program swept him up. Every summer, musical theater, singing, and dance brought the city's children together. From his first participation, something clicked. "Every summer, I returned until the end of my adolescence. That's how I discovered the performing arts."

Yet the true revelation came a little later. Around sixteen or seventeen, he tried classical ballet and then modern dance. Something settled within him. "The more I discovered dance, the more I perceived it as a very open art form, a space where it was possible to express a great deal through movement, the body, and gesture."

From Seattle...

His journey began at the University of Seattle before leading him to New York at twenty-one. He dreamed of joining Trisha Brown's company, whose work he had long admired. The audition didn't go as hoped, but failure didn't paralyze him. Instead, it stimulated him. He had already created his first piece in 2004 in Seattle, a short solo titled Digestive Noise. The instinct to create had been ingrained in him from the start. In New York, Daniel Linehan met Miguel Gutiérrez. They connected immediately. For four years, he danced with Gutiérrez while developing his own pieces, solos and short forms presented in all kinds of venues.

From the New York choreographer, Linehan retained a way of working that would remain foundational. "He taught me to allow dance to remain raw, not necessarily highly composed, but more based on improvisation and exploration." In parallel, Linehan attended workshops with RoseAnne Spradlin, Terry O'Connor, and Juliette Mapp, and took classes at the Trisha Brown Studio. In the heart of the big city, artistic life offered him numerous opportunities, decisive encounters, and frictions that shaped a way of building himself through accumulation.

...to Brussels: Learning the World

Then came Europe, like a calling. Performances by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jérôme Bel, and Mårten Spångberg, seen on tour in New York, opened up a different horizon for him, more conceptual, more written. He heard about P.A.R.T.S., the Brussels-based school founded by the legendary Flemish choreographer. At twenty-five, he packed his bags. "Ultimately, it was on the other side of the Atlantic, in Europe, that the essence of my training was built." Two years of intense research where he worked with Xavier Le Roy and absorbed the rigorous grammar of choreographic composition.

Brussels became his new anchor point. There, he founded his company, Hiatus, and built, piece by piece, a singular body of work marked by a dual belonging. "I come from two traditions. On one side, something spontaneous, improvised, raw. On the other, a very written and constructed approach. I love making these two dimensions dialogue."

An Ultrasensitive Language, Woven Between Body and World

From the first solo presented by his company, created in 2007, the essence was established. Movement, light, text, and music merged in an introspective vertigo. The signature was there, recognizable: a hypersensitivity to the body as a territory of experience, an insatiable curiosity for what movement can say about the world, a way of placing the intimate in service of a broader reflection. Works like *'Montage for Three'* and *'Karaoke Dialogues'* confirmed a trajectory where each creation begins with a sincere, intimate question. "Most of the time, a project is born from a desire to learn. Very often, I start with something I don't yet know and that I want to explore."

Ecology gradually entered his concerns, not as a displayed theme, but as a way of being in the world, a framework for understanding. Thinking of living beings not as separate entities but as a network of relationships in perpetual transformation. This thinking deeply irrigates his recent creations, guiding his formal choices, his treatment of presence, light, and sound. "I try to think of the world not as a set of separate entities, but as a network of relationships."

The Quiet Magic: The Art of Reducing Noise

It is from this foundation that '*The Quiet Magic*' was born. A single, simple question at the start: What happens when we reduce the noise? "I feel like I'm moving in a world saturated with sound, aggression, sometimes even violence. I wanted to create a space where we could distance ourselves from these elements to discover other qualities of the body." Daniel Linehan doesn't avoid reality, he engages with it differently. He resists through withdrawal, digging into silence until something vivid emerges.

To embody this intention, he called on Víctor Pérez Armero. The two men have known each other since P.A.R.T.S., where the Catalan dancer belonged to the next generation. They collaborated from 2014 to 2020 on six creations before the Spanish artist joined Cullberg in Stockholm and then returned to Catalonia. Five years passed, and the desire to pick up the thread where they left off returned. "I had kept excellent memories of that collaboration. Victor had been an important source of inspiration in the past. We share a long history of work together."

The duo imposed itself as an obvious form. Only two bodies on stage, and everything they do necessarily exists in relation to the other. "Sometimes we mirror each other, sometimes we echo each other. Sometimes one becomes the witness of the other." Daniel Linehan wanted to show on stage something resembling a deep friendship, not a romantic relationship, but that particular intimacy that allows for mutual support, playing together. "I was interested in the qualities specific to friendship and how they can be expressed through the body."

Adrianne Lenker: A Voice That Enters the Body

Music arrived very early in the process, not as accompaniment, but as raw material, as a starting point. Adrienne Lenker, an American singer-songwriter, recorded two albums in 2020 during the pandemic, in a cabin in the middle of nature. *'Songs and Instrumentals'*, her voice and guitar carried by the environment that continued to exist around her: birds, chimes, wind, rain. "The soundtrack is extremely stripped down. But this opens up an immense space because it's not a studio recording isolated from the world. The external environment remains present in the sound."

This porosity deeply resonates with Daniel Linehan. Victor Pérez Armero and he sit and let the pieces enter their bodies. "We were looking for deep listening." From this listening, the first improvisations emerged, followed by the first principles of movement. The spine first, its extension, uncoiling, contraction. Then breathing, as a fundamental rhythm, this movement of opening outward and returning to the center. "The entire piece is traversed by these rhythms of expansion, release, and return."

Iridescent Sculptures and Northern Lights on Stage

The scenography by Cee Füllemann and the lighting by Meri Ekola add an additional dimension. In the theater space, sculptures covered in an iridescent, shiny material wait for the light to touch them. When it does, they project rainbow colors into the space, luminous lines that cross the stage like the Northern Lights. The effect is magical but understated, discreet like a surprise for those who truly look. "At first, these objects remain mysterious. Then the light reflects off them and reveals fine colored lines."

This is another possible definition of magic according to Daniel Linehan: not the spectacular effect, but the quality of attention required to perceive what unfolds in silence. The light, the music with its birds and chimes, the bodies breathing together on stage form a single resonant space. "It's not just about the magic within us, but also about creating a subtly magical atmosphere through light and scenography."

Introversion as a Political Stance

At its core, *The Quiet Magic* says something about him. He admits it readily, with the slightly shy smile that often appears. In life, he is introverted. He loves solitude, nature, close friends rather than large gatherings. Some of his past works went against this temperament, more extroverted, louder, more demonstrative. Here, he follows his natural inclination. And he sees it as a deliberate act. "In our societies, we often tend to value extroversion. Yet there is great value in slowing down, becoming quieter, taking the time to reflect and listen."

Listening. The word comes up often in the conversation, like a leitmotif. Listening to the music before moving, being attentive to the other on stage, letting the body speak before imposing a form on it, remaining sensitive to the world as it is in order not to submit to it but to better respond to it. This is not a posture. It is a conviction that runs through his entire body of work, from the first solo in 2007 to this duo where two men on an empty stage prove, through movement and silence, that dancing is also a way of standing tall.