

# BALLET FOR LIFE



BÉJART  
BALLET  
LAUSANNE

GIL ROMAN  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**Choreography:** Maurice Béjart  
**Music:** Queen, Mozart  
**Costumes:** Versace

# SYNOPSIS

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A little over thirty years ago, in between Berlioz surprising music interspersed with bombing and the sound of machine guns, an unconventional Friar Lawrence cried out to Jorge Donn and Hitomi Asakawa: "Make love, not war!"

Today, Gil Roman, who is about the same age as the creation of my *Romeo and Juliet*, surrounded by dancers who have never seen this ballet, answers: "You told us to make love, not war. We made love. Why is love waging war on us?"

A cry from the youth, for whom the problem of death by Love is added to the multiple wars that have never ceased in the world since the so-called END of the last World War!

Above all, my ballets are encounters: with music, with life, with death, with love... with all those, whose life and works find a renewal within me. Moreover, the dancer who I am no longer is reincarnated each time by the dancers who surpass this former self.

A love affair with the music by Queen. Invention, violence, humour, love: it's all there. I love the group. They inspire me and guide me, sometimes through this no man's land where we will all go one day and where, I am sure, Freddie Mercury is playing a duet on the piano with Mozart.

A ballet about youth and hope, as hopeless and optimistic as they are. Despite everything, I believe that "the show must go on", as Queen put it in one of their songs.

◆ Maurice Béjart



# ARTISTIC SHEET

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Choreography	Maurice Béjart
Music	Queen, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Costumes design	Gianni Versace
Lighting design Lighting	Clément Cayrol Dominique Roman
Video editing	Germaine Cohen
Premiere	Salle Métropole, Lausanne – December 15, 1996
Revival	Teatro Comunale, Vicence – March 8, 2008
Original cast	Gil Roman, Gregor Metzger, Christine Blanc, Koen Onzia, Juichi Kobayashi

**Trailer *Ballet for Life*:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYgpJv-Dj90>



# “THIS IS NOT A BALLET ABOUT AIDS”

AFTER A PREMIERE IN LAUSANNE IN DECEMBER 1996, MAURICE BÉJART PRESENTED *BALLET FOR LIFE* THE 17TH OF JANUARY 1997 AT THE THÉÂTRE OF CHAILLOT IN PARIS, WITH GREGOR METZGER AND GIL ROMAN DANCING THE LEAD ROLES.



© BBL - Gregory Beardon

Maurice Béjart did not have to search for the idea of *Ballet for Life*, it was evident. He liked Queen’s music that he discovered during the eighties. Then he became aware that Freddie Mercury and Jorge Donn both died from AIDS at the age of 45. Then again, he was struck by the landscape decorating the posthumous CD of Mercury *Made in Heaven*: a masterful view over Lake Geneva.

It was almost the one the choreographer enjoyed from his chalet in Sonchoux, over Villeneuve. Freddie Mercury too was very connected with this region. He lived his last years in a rented villa in Clarens. His band bought the Mountain Studios inside the right wing of the Casino of Montreux. That’s also where David Bowie, Iggy Pop and the Rolling Stones recorded! That made a lot of coincidences or, to quote Béjart, a lot of “connections”.

Because he wanted to create a ballet about Mercury and Donn, Béjart searched to contact the Queen producer, Jim Beach, and he found him in Montreux also!

“It will not be a ballet about AIDS, decided Béjart, but about people who died young.” He listened endlessly to Queen’s albums. “I prefer live recordings. When they record in studio they are slower, less galvanized by the public.” The scenography would be dark. Giants X-rays in black and white would even ornate the stage, on Mozart’s music. Béjart opted for musical cross over.

## QUEEN AND ELTON JOHN ON STAGE

The costumes would be light, or at least colored. To draw it, a name was evident: Gianni Versace. Initiated in 1984, the collaboration between the two creators had already enlightened ballets like *Dionysos*, *Malraux*, *Chéreau-Mishima-Perón* and *Pyramid*. "I like to work with him because his enthusiasm, his fervor, is infectious (...) As soon as we begin to work, he is stressed like a beginner. Me too. That is the secret of our friendship."

We had to find a title to this ballet "about youth and hope". Béjart searched for an expression as neutral as possible, in order not to have people guessing anything about his project. Rereading Gaston Leroux, he adopted Rouletabille's password in *Le Mystère de la chambre jaune*: "Le Presbytère n'a rien perdu de son charme, ni le jardin de son éclat" ("The presbyter did not lost his charm, nor the garden his radiance"). It is also a wink to the Chemin du Presbytère in Lausanne where his company has its headquarters.

Presented for the first time at the Métropole in Lausanne, on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1996, with Gregor Metzger and Gil Roman in the lead roles, the ballet was then performed the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1997 at the Théâtre of Chaillot in Paris. That night, prestigious guests attended the show: Bernadette Chirac, Farah Dibah, Frédéric Mitterrand, Yves Mourousi, Jérôme Savary and Claude Nobs.

Double show on stage, because at the end of the song *It's a Beautiful Day*, Béjart moved along among his dancers lying on the floor under white shrouds. He was then joined, on the back of the stage, by Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon with their instruments and by Elton John, who stroke up *Show must go on*, under the cheering of the audience. At the end, Béjart raised his fist high in the air to show his certainty of the victory of life on death.

◆ Jean Pierre Pastori



# A BALLET ORGANIZED LIKE A VIDEO CLIP

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MUSIC RECORDED IN STUDIO HAND PROGRESSIVELY OVER TO LIVE RECORDINGS. THE STRENGTH OF THE COMPOSITIONS DOUBLES WITH THE ECHO OF AN IMMENSE CROWD, UNITED BY THE SAME DESIRE OF LOVE.

"As in many Maurice Béjart's creations, music is essential", underlines Gil Roman. Support of the choreography, the soundtrack of *Ballet for Life* is a clever mix between studio recordings and public one. "The ballet is put together like a huge video clip", continues BBL's artistic director. The more one enters the story, the more live there is." The strength of the compositions doubles with the echo of an immense crowd, united by the same desire of love.

"Queen's music is vital energy, while Mozart's music is linked with death and the notion of an implacable destiny."



## MOZART : THE GRAVE AND SENSUAL GRACE

In his choreography *Mozart – Tango*, Béjart played on the opposition between the elegant grace of Mozart and his more determined and physical dimension. In *Ballet for Life*, he gives Mozart an all other dimension. Béjart choose the intimate face of the too early disappeared composer, instead of the gallant one. Beautiful, fragile, ethereal or left on stretchers, bodies brush and love on the "andante" from the *Concerto for piano no 21*, space of grace and gravity where relief and dolor get mixed up. To speak about the living facing death, Béjart did not choose the *Requiem* but the *Funeral Masonic music* and its solemn instrumentation, with no voices.

Singing is kept for the extract of *Così fan tutte*, that goes with the scene of the separation between the two couples of lovers. The men say they are going to war. Actually, they will test love and loyalty in a cruel game on a beautiful music: *Addio*. The dancers separate. "Addio!" The Mozart's heroes have also loved love and got lost in it, like an echo of the question of *Ballet for Life*: "You told us: make love, not war. We made love, but why love declared war to us?"

◆ Dominique Rosset - L'Hebdo

## QUEEN : THE SENSE OF IMMODERATION

It's no surprise that Béjart choose to integrate Queen's music to his ballets. Him that was inspired by Jacques Brel could not stay insensitive to the hyper-expressivity of their rock music. Formed during the seventies in London, Queen was lead by the charismatic Freddie Mercury. A muscular guy at ease just as well in skin-tight as in a transvestite costume. Queen, it's a sense of the show and immoderation push to the extreme; it's a "rock'n'roll circus" at the crossing of classical, pop and hard-rock music.

When he joined the band Smile of Robert Taylor and Brian May and renamed it, Mercury anticipated the next fashion: musicians disguised and wearing make-up, colored costumes and high-heel shoes. Like David Bowie, Queen owns its success as much for its music, as for its looks.

Deceased the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1991 at the age of 45 years old of AIDS, Freddie Mercury has been during twenty years one of the most improbable and extravagant star of rock history. Through the twenty titles used in *Ballet for Life*, Béjart found a new way of underlining bodies and the virtuosity of gestures.

◆ Stéphane Gobbo - L'Hebdo





# MUSICAL REFERENCES

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## John Deacon

Album: Made in Heaven; Title: *Winter's Tale*;  
Performers: Queen; Record: EMI;  
Ref.: 4835542

Album: The Works; Title: *I Want To Break Free*, live at Wembley 86. Performers: Queen;  
Record: EMI; Ref.: 7995942

## Brian May

Album: Live Killer; Title: *Brighton Rock*;  
Performers: Queen; Record: EMI;  
Ref.: 7895002

Album: Sheer Heart Attack; Title: *Brighton Rock*, solo live at Wembley 86;  
Performers: Queen; Record: EMI;  
Ref.: 7995942

Album: A Night At the Opera; Title: *The Prophet's Song*; Performers: Queen;  
Record: EMI; Ref.: 7894922

## Freddie Mercury

Album: A Night at the Opera; Title: *Love of my life*, live at Wembley 86; Performers: Queen;  
Record: EMI; Ref.: 7995942

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Ref.: UOCD 668

Album: A Day at the Races; Title: *You Take My Breath Away*; Performers: Queen;  
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Ref.: 4835542

Album: Live Killers; Title: *Get down make love*;  
Performers: Queen; Record: EMI;  
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### Roger Taylor

Album: The Works; Title: *Radio Gaga*;  
Performers: Queen; Record: EMI;  
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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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Director: Eugene Jochum; Performers: Bamberger Symphoniker;  
Record: ORFEO; Ref: C 045902 A

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*Nr. Andante Moderato*; Director: Nikolaus Harnoncourt;  
Performers: Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam;  
Record: TELEDEL;  
Ref.: 2428952

Album: Piano Concerto N.21; Titles: *Klavierkonzert N21 C-DUR "Elvira Madigan" KV 427, Il Andante*;  
Director: Wolfgang Sawallisch;  
Performers: Philharmonia Orchestra London, Annie Fischer;  
Record: EMI; Ref.: CDE 7677782

Album: Sinfonia Concertante K. 364 in E-Flat Major; Title: *Andante*;  
Director: Nikolaus Harnoncourt; Performers: Wiener Philharmoniker, Gidon Kremer (violin), Kim Kashkashian (viola/alto);  
Record: EMI;  
Ref.: 429 606-2

Album: Così fan tutte; Titles: *Recitativo: Non V'è Più Tempo, Muoio D'affanno!... Quintetto: Di Scrivermi Ogni Giorno...*;  
Director: Karl Böhm;  
Performers: Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig, Alfredo Kraus, Giuseppe Taddei, Walter Berry;  
Record: EMI; Ref.: CMS 7693302



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# COSTUMES: “TOGETHER THEY HAD THE AUDACITY OF DOING EVERYTHING”

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FOR ANTONIO D'AMICO, LIFE COMPANION AND VERSACE'S ASSISTANT, “MAURICE WAS TO DANCE WHAT GIANNI WAS TO FASHION: A BRILLIANT SPIRIT, KNOWING HOW TO MERGE PAST AND PRESENT, POETRY AND AVANT-GARDE”.

The friendship between the fashion-designer and the choreographer began in the beginning of the eighties during a fashion show of the Italian stylist.

For Béjart it was dazzling. He saw in the fashion show a kind of ballet. He then realized that costumes were missing in his shows; costumes designed as pieces of art. After the show, he met the fashion-designer backstage. Versace was deeply moved; he knows by heart the choreographer's work and respects him greatly...

## THE ORIGINS OF FUSION

“It was love at first sight, tells Antonio D'Amico. This spontaneous meeting, almost magical, changed their lives. Maurice was to dance what Gianni was to fashion: a brilliant spirit, knowing how to merge past and present, poetry and avant-garde.” It all starts with *Dionysos*, an order from the Scala of Milano in 1984. This friendship and collaboration will last fifteen years, till the death of Gianni Versace on the 15th of July 1997 in front of his Miami's house. “Maurice was like a big brother for Gianni. They looked strangely alike, they put beauty and elegance above all, remembered Antonio D'Amico. It was an honor and a privilege to see them working together. They did not need to talk; they understood each other at once. One more stubborn, more generous, more intense than the other. Maurice always said that Gianni succeeded to forestall and anticipate his gestures. That was true.”



*“As you can see, the first one is inspired by Picasso's cubism, while using a very strong color, a red for example.”*

- Gianni Versace to Maurice Béjart,  
13<sup>th</sup> of November 1996

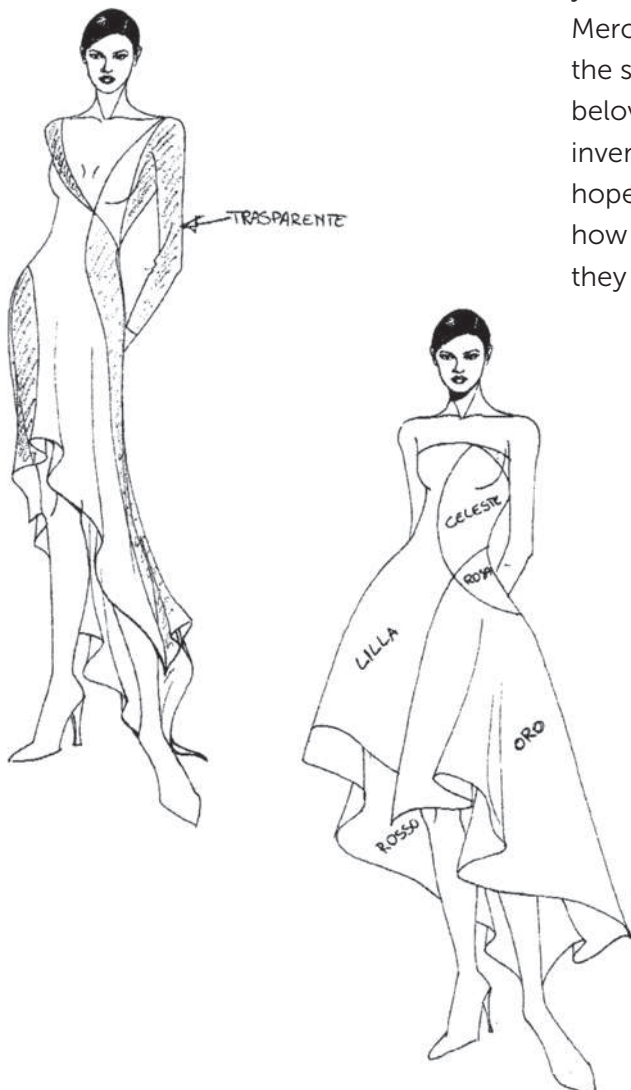
For Gianni Versace, working with B ejart was working without constraints, away from a commercial vision of fashion: "It's liberation, it's the possibility to create without constraints characters and myths", told Gianni to the media. Together, they were a wonderful machine creating dreams: They realized 12 amazing creations together: From *Dionysos* to *Malraux* but also *Pyramid* and in 1997, *Ballet for Life*. An anthem to youth that loves and fears nothing, in which we find again the distinctive use of two colors that Versace liked so much. One also find again his taste for details and noble materials. All this sublimated by rock energy, a dazzling seduction and eroticism.

### A TIME TRAVEL

During *Ballet for Life* rehearsals, while Freddie Mercury's voice sang *Show Must Go On*, the dancers executed, B ejart corrected and Versace draw. "The past was a material to explore, Maurice did not want to stay in the same era. So we were travelling across time with fabrics and forms, continues Antonio d'Amico. Gianni was fascinated by Maurice's intellectual work and Maurice liked his Mediterranean generosity, his will to go further, his way of being stressed like a beginner."

B ejart wanted to tell a story of death and youth in memory of Jorge Donn and Freddie Mercury, both deceased at the age of 45 from the same disease. While AIDS was taking many beloved persons, B ejart and Versace tried to invent for them canvas overflowed with love, hope and beauty. "For Maurice, Gianni knows how to dress the soul of dancers. Together, they had the audacity of doing everything."

◆ Sophie Grecuccio



*"I want the costumes to be white, all white. I asked Gianni Versace for them. In white, we can make extravagant shapes, there will always be rigour. One of the gifts that this new creation offers me is the chance to meet Gianni again.*

*We haven't worked together for a long time (a long time, that is, a few years). I like working with him, because his enthusiasm, his fervour, are communicative. More than a hundred shops around the world bear his name, but that's not what interests me, and I wonder what he cares about the most...*

*As soon as we begin to work, he is stressed like a beginner. Me too. That is the secret of our friendship.\**

◆ Maurice Béjart

\*Excerpts from "La Vie de Qui ?" Mémoires 2, Maurice Béjart, Ed. Flammarion, 1996



# PRESS REVIEW

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"With BÉjart, dancing makes us want to cry."

◆ Marie-Eve Barbier, La Provence (France), 2015

"*Heaven for everyone*, Queen sang. We're not that far from it with this ballet."

◆ Philippe Noisette, Les Échos (France), 2015

"The talent of each dancer blossoms at the rhythm of meticulously timed choreographies, which naturally combine contemporary style with more classical elements."

◆ Le Bien Public (France), 2015



© BBL - Francette Levioux

"It is a long danced poem that escalates with bodies grazing and embracing each other in a madly exciting energy."

◆ Isabelle Moreau, Ouest-France (France), 2015

"Many sequences make the audience want to rise. But the BÉjart dancers dispel this desire with their magical performances."

◆ Véronique Baud, Paris Normandie (France), 2015

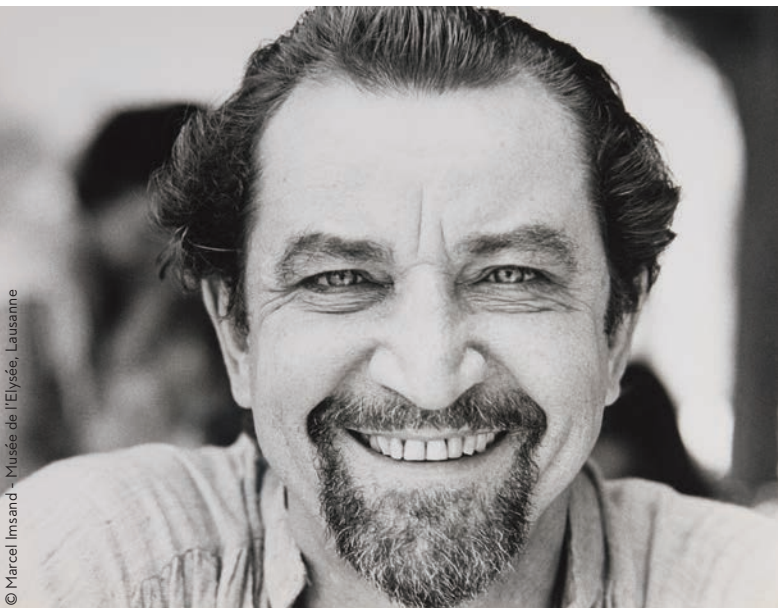
"All three nights were sold out. Every evening the standing ovation was in order, and amply deserved... Huge, exciting, tremendously dynamic and beautiful."

◆ Frédéric Minard, drapsdetoutelaine.org (France), 2015



# MAURICE BÉJART

© Marcel Imsand - Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne



IN THE EARLY FIFTIES, IN PARIS, MAURICE BÉJART CREATES CHOREOGRAPHIES FOR HIS FIRST COMPANY, LES BALLETS DE L'ETOILE. IN 1960, HE FORMS LE BALLETS DU XX<sup>E</sup> SIÈCLE IN BRUSSELS. A QUARTER OF A CENTURY LATER, HE MOVES HIS COMPANY TO LAUSANNE, GIVING BIRTH TO THE BÉJART BALLET LAUSANNE.


Maurice Béjart is born in Marseille on January 1, 1927. He begins his career in Vichy in 1946, continues with Janine Charrat, Roland Petit and especially in London as part of the International Ballet. During a tour in Sweden with the Cullberg Ballet (1949), he discovers the resources of choreographic expressionism. A Swedish film project confronts him for the first time with Stravinsky, but back in Paris, he gathers choreographic experience with compositions by Chopin, with support of the critic Jean Laurent.

From now on the dancer is doubled as a choreographer.

In 1955, he confirms his thinking outside the box with the choreography of *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, performed by his company Les Ballets de l'Etoile. Noticed by Maurice Huisman, the new director of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, he creates a triumphant *The Rite of Spring* (1959).

In 1960, Maurice Béjart launches, in Brussels, Le Ballet du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle, an international company touring around the world, and the number of his creations is steadily increasing: *Boléro* (1961), *Messe pour le temps présent* (1967) and *L'Oiseau de feu* (1970).

In 1987, Le Ballet du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle becomes the Béjart Ballet Lausanne and the great choreographer sets up in the Olympic capital. In 1992, he decides to downsize his company to about thirty dancers to "recapture the essence of the performer" and he founds the Ecole-Atelier Rudra Béjart. Among the many ballets for this company, we find *Le Mandarin merveilleux*, *King Lear - Prospero*, *À propos de Shéhérazade*, *Ballet for Life*, *MutationX*, *La Route de la soie*, *Le Manteau*, *L'Enfant-Roi*, *La Lumière des eaux* and *Lumière*.

As well as directing plays (*La Reine verte*, *Casta Diva*, *Cinq Nô modernes*, *A-6-Roc*), operas (*Salomé*, *La Traviata* and *Don Giovanni*) and films (*Bhakti*, *Paradoxe sur le comédien...*), Maurice Béjart has also published several books (novels, memories, a personal diary and a play). In 2007, on the eve of his eightieth birthday, the choreographer creates *La Vie du danseur racontée par Zig et Puce*. While working on what will be his last creation, *Le Tour du Monde en 80 Minutes*, Maurice Béjart passed away in Lausanne on 22 November 2007. 

# GIL ROMAN



© BBL - Philippe Pache

**DURING MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS,  
THE DANCER INTERPRETED MAURICE  
BEJART'S MOST RENOWNED BALLETS  
BEFORE BECOMING IN TURN THE ARTISTIC  
DIRECTOR OF  
THE BÉJART BALLET LAUSANNE.**

After intensive training with Marika Besobrasova, Rosella Hightower and José Ferran, Gil Roman joined Maurice Béjart at Le Ballet du XXe Siècle in 1979. He has performed in Béjart's most renowned ballets during more than thirty years. Appointed by Maurice Béjart as his successor and Artistic Director in 2007, he creates new choreographies and preserves Béjart's legacy.

Since 1995, his choreographic work is rich in numerous creations: *L'habit ne fait pas le moine*, *Réflexion sur Béla*, *Echographie d'une baleine*, *Casino des Esprits*, *Aria*, *Syncope*, *Là où sont les oiseaux* (presented as a world premiere at the China Shanghai International

Arts Festival), *Anima blues*, *3 Danses pour Tony*, *Kyôdai*, *Tombées de la dernière pluie*, *Impromptu...* and *t'M et variations...* marking the 30th anniversary of the BBL's creation and the 10th year of Maurice Béjart's demise. In 2019 at the Opéra de Lausanne, he presented *Tous les hommes presque toujours s'imaginent* entirely choreographed to the music of John Zorn and one year later, *Basso Continuum* set to the music of Richard Dubugnon.

Gil Roman's dance career, which span over 40 years, was honored in 2005 with the prestigious Danza & Danza Award for Best Dancer for his performance as Jacques Brel in *Brel et Barbara*. In 2006, the Monaco Dance Forum awarded him the Nijinsky Award.

In 2014, Vaud State Foundation for Culture awarded Gil Roman with the Prix for cultural awareness and, in November of the same year, he received the special Prize from Shanghai Art Festival for his work on Maurice Béjart's choreography *The Ninth Symphony*. In 2015, at KKL Theater in Luzern on May 15, he was rewarded with the Maya Plissetskaya Award 2015 during a special night in memory of the great dancer, who passed away a few weeks before. On May 29, 2015, Gil Roman received the insignia of Knight of the National Order of Merit (Chevalier dans l'Ordre national du Mérite) from France's Ambassador in Switzerland, His Excellency Mr. René Roudaut. This prestigious award celebrates the career, cultural influence and creative spirit of the Artistic Director. Four years later, the Canton of Vaud's State Council has honored him the Cantonal Merit for his "remarkable contribution to choreography and dance".

# THE COMPANY

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1987, BÉJART BALLET LAUSANNE IS A REFERENCE IN THE CHOREOGRAPHIC WORLD. CHOSEN AS HIS SUCCESSOR BY MAURICE BÉJART, GIL ROMAN IS LEADING THE COMPANY AND PRESERVING ITS ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE, SINCE THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MASTER IN 2007.

Maurice Béjart always wanted to open the world of the ballet to a larger audience. Animated by the same spirit, Gil Roman and his dancers perform all over the world. Béjart Ballet Lausanne is one of the very few companies able to fill vast spaces such as the NHK Hall of Tokyo, the Kremlin State Palace of Moscow, Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens, the Palais des congrès de Paris, Forest National in Brussels or the Patinoire de Malley-Lausanne.

Since 2007, with his search and work for contemporary creation, Gil Roman maintains and develops the repertoire of the Béjart Ballet Lausanne. The work of Maurice Béjart is at the heart of this repertoire, with emblematic

choreographies, as *The Rite of Spring*, *Boléro*, *The Ninth Symphony* of Beethoven or *Ballet for Life* but Gil Roman also wants to present the variety of this repertoire, with *Piaf* or *The Magic Flute* for example. Choreographer for 20 years, the artistic director also nourished the repertoire with his own creations. Choreographers like Alonzo King, Tony Fabre, Christophe Garcia, Giorgio Madia, Julio Arozarena or Yuka Oishi also contributed to the creative development of the Béjart Ballet Lausanne.

The company remains faithful to its vocation: preserving Maurice Béjart's work, while remaining a space of creation. ◆

**BÉJART BALLET LAUSANNE**

Chemin du Presbytère 12  
1004 Lausanne  
Switzerland  
[www.bejart.ch](http://www.bejart.ch)

**Production director**

**Richard Perron**

T. +41 21 641 64 92  
M. +41 79 764 43 92  
[r.perron@bejart.ch](mailto:r.perron@bejart.ch)

**Executive director**

**Jean Ellgass**

T. +41 21 641 64 95  
M. +41 79 243 19 91  
[j.ellgass@bejart.ch](mailto:j.ellgass@bejart.ch)

**Head of communication**

**Ha-Cam Dinh**

T. +41 21 641 64 81  
[h.dinh@bejart.ch](mailto:h.dinh@bejart.ch)



**BÉJART  
BALLET  
LAUSANNE**  
GIL ROMAN  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR