

**Dossier**

**Creation 2024**

**Premiere 24 January 2025**

# O amor natural

**Andrew Graham | laGeste**



*Parade © Sofie De Backere*

"I realized that the presence, the proximity, the openness of another body can be an answer to a relational need, a motivation to dance. Dance then becomes an emancipated environment that can respond to our needs and intentions." Andrew Graham

## CONTEXT

Andrew Graham appeared on Hildegard De Vuyst's radar in 2019. At the time, she was a dramaturge at the Festival de Marseille and had put together a revival of Alain Platel's *Le Sacre* as an urban project. This version of Stravinsky's dance music was populated with local dance groups that share a physical practice for very different reasons: from salsa and samba to krump and hip-hop, to Eastern European folk dances, to more contemporary practices, with groups of schoolchildren or elderly people, from institutions or neighbourhood-based.

One motley collection of dancers stood out in Marseille: a group that did not let itself be known by a strongly defined identity, guided by dancer-choreographer Andrew Graham. Its individuality consisted exactly of this blending of possibilities and limitations, of generations and genders. That group was the externalisation of Graham's desire for 'mixability'. After years of experience at the pre-eminent inclusive dance company in the UK, Candoco, a return to the south of France was the starting point for developing its own practice based on a unique vision that embraces all bodies: with visible or invisible disabilities, formally trained or self-taught.

Since 2019, a few things have happened. Andrew Graham founded l'Autre Maison in Marseille, dedicated to the practice of mixability, and made the creation *Parade* (2021 and 2022) at the invitation of Festival de Marseille. Hildegard De Vuyst is artistic director of laGeste, which continues the legacy of Les ballets C de la B and the inclusive approach that was central to Alain Platel's work.

After Marseille, between 2019 and 2022, Graham, at the invitation of Jan Goossens, has also thoroughly immersed himself in Tunis where he is preparing a project for Dream City 2023. For *Lines*, over a two-year period in Tunis, he brought together a group of children with disabilities and their mothers, nieces, brothers, of migrants, LGBTQIA+ and everything in between. The downside of deeply local work is that both *Parade* and *Lines* barely tour. *O amor natural* is a performance that can tour both nationally and internationally.



*Parade* © Sofie De Backere

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## BALLROOMS

*O amor natural* was made in different periods. The first period ran from November to mid-December 2023. Andrew Graham opened the doors of Studio laGeste wide to create *Ballrooms*. He exploited the setting of a 'ball' to achieve two goals. He researched and reinvented couple dancing by revisiting classic gender patterns. And was inspired by 1970s New York ballroom culture: a haven for a marginalised community that perfected its own dance codes and styles.

At the same time, *Ballrooms* creates a meeting place and party space in the heart of the city, bringing together people whose paths would not spontaneously cross: dancers with disabilities, the queer community, refugees, members of the laGeste choir (from Alain Platel's remarkable performance *Mein Gent*, created in 2023, to be revived in July 2024), as well as participants in laGeste's inclusive workshops.

After this period of research and development, which also enabled the formation of a cast, work with the performers will continue in 2024, with a view to the premiere of *O amor natural* in January '25.



Ballrooms © Sofie De Backere

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## CHOREOGRAPHIC POEMS

The title of *O amor natural* is based on the work of Heddy Honingmann, a beautiful documentary about poems and erotic stories by elderly Brazilians. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8LzRtiVKE0>

Andrew Graham sums it up this way: "Care, romance, fluid identity and fantasy all come together in this choreographic creation, conceived as a series of non-verbal haikus. Poems choreographed around touch and the possible relationships of trust between bodies such as the tension between two bodies, two hearts in a tango, for example." The keywords in this physical creation are desire, love, pleasure, consent and limitation.

*O amor natural* goes beyond the binary codes of yes and no and explores consent in all its non-verbal richness: whispers, body temperature, breathing, gaze and speed of movement weave a web of intimacy. The concept of consent raises many questions about care practices, but also about sexual and artistic practices. How do we know and how do we communicate what we do and do not want? On what basis can we consent to a practice that is still foreign to us?

For people with disabilities, touch is often associated with a medical act, as if their bodies are objects to be manipulated and moved without regard to their physical and emotional needs, in a relationship that is necessarily devoid of any sensuality. *O amor natural* is about giving ourselves the chance to express the complexity of touch in our relationships, where we often only allow ourselves to conceive of touch in a medical or sexualised relationship.

Over the course of his choreographic work with a variety of audiences, including people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrants, older people and professional artists, Andrew Graham has repeatedly witnessed a relational need and the lack of contact that leads some people to dance. "I realised," says the choreographer, "that the presence, proximity and availability of other bodies can be a response to this need and is a motivation to dance. Dance then becomes an emancipated environment that can respond to our needs and intentions."

It is also crucial to ask how a city, a cultural institution or a society can be a constraint for an individual, a body or a fantasy that falls outside the norm.

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## THE CAST

Six performers are at the heart of the show: Amir Sabra, Tijen Lawton, Isnelle da Silvera, Wim Auwerx, Vladimir Perrin and Maarten Degezelle.

Each person carries and brings a world with them. *O amor natural* is an encounter between people with very different sexual, physical, cultural and professional experiences. The cast brings together different worlds in terms of age, (in)visible disability, ethnicity, libertine or conservative minds, experience with dance and inclusive practices.

Andrew Graham is also counting on the participation of the laGeste choir. This group of volunteers was formed in 2019 as part of *Mein Gent*. Led by Steven Prengels, the choir forms a network of friends and enthusiasts of almost 100 people committed to social, artistic and community actions

fundamental to the well-being of Ghent. Steven Prengels, composer of *Gardenia, En avant, marche!*, *Nicht schlafen, Mein Gent* and *Ombra* by Alain Platel, is responsible for the soundscape of *O amor natural*. The choir provides the soundtrack, while a video installation of each choir member's lips forms the show's scenography. The practice of lip-sync or playback, experimented with in the research phase of *Ballrooms*, not only meets the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing people, who focus on lip-reading, but also becomes a choreographic gesture, bringing hearing-impaired and queer people together around the same cultures.

Andrew Graham's creative method is based on attentive listening to the needs of dancers and their environment. In addition to movement and song, he uses sign language and audio description as art languages in their own right. Audio description devolves into stories or poetry, while lips and hands join forces to explore notions of 'leading' and 'following', direction and manipulation, support, help and guidance. *O amor natural* is also about the play of power relations between trust and complicity.

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## CREDITS

*concept & direction* Andrew Graham

*with* Amir Sabra, Isnelle Da Silveira, Maarten Degezelle, Tijen Lawton, Vladimir Perrin, Wim Auwerx

*composer* Steven Prengels in collaboration with the choir of laGeste

*dramaturgy* Hildegard De Vuyst

*touring* Helena Elshout | laGeste

*production* laGeste (Gand, BE)

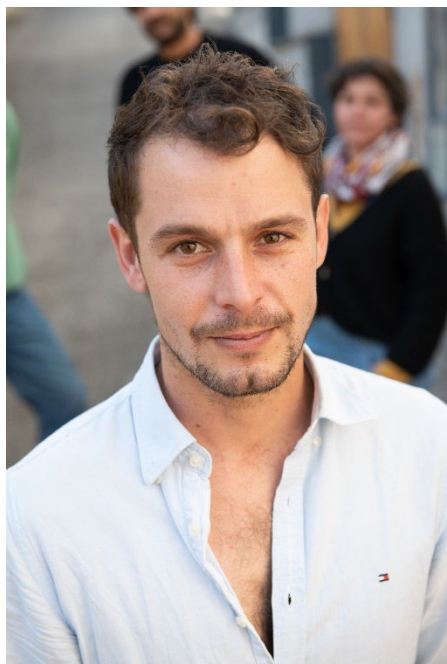
*supported by* City of Ghent, Flemish Authorities and the Belgian Federal Government's Tax Shelter measure through Flanders Tax Shelter



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## DISCOVER ANDREW GRAHAM

Graham: "My practice allows me to question my own understanding of 'invitation', in other words to understand the different ways I can relate to each person. It is about working on the basis of trust and choice, based on the needs of each individual. My aim is always to provide access to my way of working, which is abstract, existential, physical, multiple and deeply relational. It is expressed in working out practical and poetic movements, as well as body-to-body relationships."



[Andrew Graham](#)

**HIS WORK**

Documentary *Alors ils dansent* (realized for *Parade*)

<https://vimeo.com/781535609>

The capture of *Parade* can be obtained from [helena@lageste.be](mailto:helena@lageste.be)

website l'Autre Maison [www.cielautremaison.com](http://www.cielautremaison.com)

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**BIOGRAPHY**



[Amir Sabra](#)



[Isnelle Da Silveira](#)



[Maarten Degezelle](#)



[Tijen Lawton](#)



[Vladimir Perrin](#)

# O amor natural

laGeste



Wim Auwerx



Steven Prengels



choir laGeste

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**PRACTICAL INFO**

Premiere *O amor natural* 24.01.25

10 people on tour: 6 dancers et 4 crew.  
Set-up and strike the same day.

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**AGENDA**

24 & 25 January 2025 at 20.00, in the Theaterzaal in De Vooruit, programmed by Art Centre  
Viernulvier (Ghent).

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**INFORMATIE OVER DE VOORSTELLING  
PERFORMANCE INFORMATION**

Updates and additions to the presentation text, credits, biographies, recent photos, trailer,  
interviews and press will be available on our website.  
This site will be updated in the coming months.

As of the premiere, you can download new high-resolution photos and the trailer the laGeste  
website.

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WRITTEN  
BY  
THE  
BODY



[www.lageste.be](http://www.lageste.be)

Each project is "un monde des possibles" populated with a diversity of bodies. Bodies carry a  
history. They can be weighed down by it, scarred by it, permeated by it to every pore. But a body is  
not a prison, a scar not a condemnation. The body also holds the promise of transformation. Bodily

practices emerge from that deep connection between place and time, between individual and community. We prefer movement, produced by that connection, to words, but without excluding language.

The body is a battlefield on which the great social battles are fought. Cisgenders versus fluids, the enterprising versus the unproductive, the excellent versus the limited, the identitarians versus those who think they can become anything and anyone, the privileged versus the decolonised, the old scarred by historical traumas versus the young threatened by ecological disasters, the haves versus the have-nots.

This polarisation has increased enormously in the last five years, and intensified in times of pandemics and other crises. With our work, we hope to create temporary spaces where we can bridge the gap between people again.

We are building an inclusive narrative, not on the margins, but right at the heart of what we do. We aim for diversity and mixability at all levels. We would like to see more reality in the represented bodies and at the same time fight for the possibility of transformation, play and poetry, of singing our way out of the boxes we keep each other in.

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## CONTACT

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