

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui & le Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève & Eastman

IHSANE

Avec 25 interprètes



CYCLE {mémoire
& héritage}



**Jeudi 12 & vendredi 13 février 2026 • 19h30
au Grand Théâtre**

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Durée **1h45 (pas d'entracte)**

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Q&A 13.02.26

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Chorégraphie **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui**

Scénographie **Amine Amharech**

Costumes **Amine Bendriouich**

Lumières **Fabiana Piccioli**

Vidéo **Maxime Guislain**

Dramaturgie **El Arbi El-Harti**

Assistants chorégraphiques **Pascal Marty, Patrick Williams
Seebacher (TwoFace)**

Directeur des répétitions **Manuel Renard**

Musique **Jasser Haj Youssef**

Design sonore **Alexandre Dai Castaing**

Textes **Timothy Winter, Jason Silva**

Assistant artistique / consultant **Morteza Zarei**

Chanteuse **Fadia Tomb El-Hage**

Chanteur **Mohammed El Arabi-Serghini**

Viole d'amour **Jasser Haj Youssef**

Oud **Nizar Rohana**

Piano **Gaël Cadoux**

Percussions **Gabriele Miracle Bragantini**

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Avec **les danseur.euse.s du Ballet du GTG: Yumi Aizawa,
Jared Brown, Ricardo Gomes Macedo, Quintin Cianci, Anna
Cenzuales, Zoé Charpentier, Oscar Comesana Salgueiro,
Juan Perez Cardona, Julio Leon Torres, Emilie Meeus,
Stefanie Noll, Nahuel Vega, Kim Van Der Put, Geoffrey Van
Dyck, Madeline Wong**
& d'Eastman **Pau Aran Gimeno, Andrea «Drew» Bouothmane,
Kazutomi «Tsuki» Kozuki, Mohamed Toukabri**

•
Production **Grand Théâtre de Genève**

Coproduction **Eastman; Théâtre du Châtelet; Les Théâtres
de la Ville de Luxembourg; Tanz Köln; Internationaal**

**Theater Amsterdam; Festspielhaus St. Pölten; Grec Festival
Barcelona 2025; Centre National des Arts Ottawa**

IHSANE

FR En arabe, *Ihsane* désigne un idéal de bonté, de gentillesse et de bienveillance. Il renvoie dans l'islam à une forme de communion avec l'univers. Avec *Ihsane*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui poursuit un diptyque commencé au sein de sa compagnie Eastman en 2022 avec *Vlaemsch (chez moi)*. Alors que *Vlaemsch* était dédié à sa mère et à ses racines flamandes, *Ihsane* explore sa relation avec son père, qui a quitté le Maroc pour la Flandre, endurant la condition d'immigré mais gardant toujours – malgré son départ – un amour inconditionnel pour son pays d'origine. Lorsque son père est mort, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui n'était encore qu'un adolescent. Trente ans plus tard, il l'a cherché en vain dans un cimetière de Tanger trop plein de tombes. Il continue de le chercher à travers cette création qui réunit des danseurs du Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève et de sa compagnie Eastman. Mais en Belgique, *Ihsane* évoque aussi un crime raciste et homophobe survenu à Liège en 2012: un jeune homme de 32 ans, homosexuel d'origine marocaine, battu à mort à la sortie d'une boîte de nuit. Se définissant lui-même comme artiste, queer et arabe, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui s'identifie à lui et lui rend hommage à travers ce spectacle qui revisite son histoire familiale. *Ihsane* est un voyage vers la quête d'une paix intérieure, la tentative de dépasser le conflit, l'abandon et l'oubli. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui danse les questions qui l'obsèdent: que nous reste-t-il lorsque notre lieu de vie se dérobe et s'efface? Comment des identités multiples peuvent-elles cohabiter dans un même corps? Comme à son habitude, le chorégraphe a rassemblé une équipe d'artistes inédite, qui témoigne de l'effervescence et de la vitalité artistique de cette région du monde à laquelle Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui est lié par ses ancêtres. Le musicien tunisien Jasser Haj Youssef, virtuose de la viole d'amour, compose la musique et l'interprète sur scène avec le chanteur marocain Mohammed El Arabi-Serghini et la chanteuse libanaise Fadia Tomb El-Hage. La scénographie est signée par le plasticien Amine Amharech, qui conçoit des espaces sensoriels et sensibles souvent mêlés d'influences maro-

caines et les costumes par le styliste Amine Bendriouich qui, au-delà des normes et des genres, transcende les formes traditionnelles du vêtement berbère. Avec *Ihsane*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui regarde le monde changer dans un cycle incessant de destruction et de renaissance. Il se méfie des cultures lorsqu'elles emprisonnent et séparent les individus. Il leur préfère la géographie en devenir, les paysages toujours recommencés, l'espace partagé où nous coexistons. Dans cet espace, il révèle les fils invisibles qui nous relient les uns aux autres.

EN In Arabic, the word *Ihsane* represents an ideal of goodness, kindness and benevolence. In Islam, it refers to a form of communion with the universe. With *Ihsane*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui continues a diptych begun within his Eastman company with *Vlaemsch (chez moi)*, in 2022. While *Vlaemsch* was dedicated to his mother and his Flemish roots, *Ihsane* explores his relationship with his father, who left Morocco for Flanders, emigrating but always retaining – despite leaving – an unconditional love for his home country. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui was still a teenager when his father died. Thirty years later, he searched for him in vain in a Tangier cemetery too full of graves. He continues to search for him through this creation bringing together dancers from the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève and Eastman. But in Belgium, *Ihsane* is also associated with a racist and homophobic crime that took place in Liège in 2012: a young homosexual man of 32, of Moroccan origin, beaten to death outside a nightclub. As someone who himself identifies as an artist, a queer and an Arab, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui identifies with and pays tribute to him through this production which revisits his family story. *Ihsane* is a journey towards the quest for inner peace, and the attempt to transcend conflict, abandonment and forgetting. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui dances the questions that obsess him: what do we have left when our home slips away and fades? How can multiple identities coexist in the same body? As ever, the choreographer has assembled a unique artistic team, reflecting the effervescence and artistic vitality of this region of the world to which Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is linked through his ancestors.

Tunisian musician and viola d'amore virtuoso, Jasser Haj Youssef, compose the music and perform it onstage with Moroccan singer Mohammed El Arabi-Serghini and Lebanese singer Fadia Tomb El-Hage. Stage design is from visual artist Amine Amharech, who creates sensory and sensitive spaces into which Moroccan influences are often melded, while costumes are by fashion designer Amine Bendriouich, who elevates traditional forms of Berber clothing beyond norms and gender. With *Ihsane*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui watches fathers fall and the world change in a never-ending cycle of destruction and rebirth. He is wary of cultures when they imprison and separate individuals. He prefers geography in the making, ever-changing landscapes, and the shared space where we coexist. In this space, he reveals the invisible threads that connect us to each other.

DE Nach *Idomeneo* kehren Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui und die TänzerInnen des Grand Théâtre de Genève und der Kompanie Eastman ins Grand Théâtre zurück. *Ihsane* ist eine Fortsetzung von Cherkaouis *Vlaemsch (chez moi)* – 22•23 ebenfalls in Luxemburg zu sehen. Während der Choreograf dort seine Mutter und seine flämischen Wurzeln in den Mittelpunkt rückte, erforscht er nun die Beziehung zu seinem Vater, der aus Marokko stammte. Der arabische Titel steht für ein Ideal von Güte, Freundlichkeit und Wohlwollen und bezieht sich im Islam auf eine Form der Gemeinschaft mit dem Universum. Ihsane war jedoch auch der Name eines 2012 in Lüttich aus rassistischen und homophoben Gründen ermordeten jungen Mannes. Das Stück zollt dem Opfer Tribut und macht sich auf die Suche nach innerem Frieden.

DISCLAIMER

Some of the images in the production reflect Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's humanist sensitivity. They express a gesture of solidarity with those who suffer, without judgment or opposition, in a spirit of universal compassion.

3 QUESTIONS TO SIDI LARBI CHERKAOU

BY ELISABETH SCHILLING

***Ihsane* seems to be both a tribute to your father and a meditation on absence. How did your personal memories shape the choreographic language of the piece – and did the process of creating it reveal or transform anything about your relationship with him or his heritage?**

The piece was a manifestation of the relationship I had with my father and with the heritage he carried. The heritage of a broken man – an immigrant, a man who came to Belgium from Tangier. It opened up a lot of questions about belonging. I think that's really what it was about: belonging. Where my father came from, where he went. It's about loss, about absence. Through this performance, which acts almost like a ritual, I tried to bury him – to say goodbye. The entire performance is rooted in the act of saying goodbye. It's about finding ways to bring back memories, to process the farewell. When you're in the act of saying goodbye, you're suddenly overwhelmed by memories of that person. In *Ihsane* there is definitely this idea of saying goodbye, of making an absent person present. Finding ways to make an absence visible, almost tangible. It became a ritual – like a mourning ritual. I wanted it to be very colourful, almost like a spell. And I wanted to create it in Europe. In places that feel disconnected from the places my father came from. There's another side to the work: addressing the clichés we have about the Middle East. I think we need to realise how deeply interconnected we actually are. For me, that connection has always been obvious because of my belonging to those cultures through my father. Yet I also realise that many people still tend to see them as opposites. For me, the piece is also a celebration of the Middle East – and of its many possible identities, which are incredibly multiple and layered. I worked with a singer from Morocco who lives in Tangier, the town my father was from. We worked with a composer from Tunisia, a Lebanese singer, an Iranian lute player. There's a real scope of

identities that came together in this work to create an imagined Middle East. An imagined geography. Much like Europe – it's a construction. It exists, but it also doesn't. We choose for it to exist. And I wanted to address that, too. And then, lastly, the piece is also a memorial. A remembrance of another man who died – Ihsane. It is tied to the murder of a man who was killed in what was identified as the first homophobic murder in Belgium. This man was also of Moroccan heritage. A queer man. I identify with him deeply. A gay Arab man who ended up dead. I felt it was important to address him – and to speak for so many men who are killed because of their sexuality, or because they are Muslim or Arab. There's this painful sense that the life of an Arab man is worth very little. So, I created a performance around it, to show how important it is to me. And to show how unimportant it seemed to be to the rest of the world. In that sense, it's a silent manifesto – of our identities that are forgotten and erased. And that the only people who can remember, who can keep them alive, are ourselves. The piece is still growing. Every time it is performed, there's more to mourn, more to celebrate, more to represent, more to remember. So much gets lost. So much is forgotten. So much is simplified. Arabic as a language was also a major inspiration for this work. It's such a specific language – always cursive, always connected. I love linking this to my movement material. In my choreography, everything is connected. Which can sometimes make it less accessible to Western audiences, who are more accustomed to clear, classical lines. I feel deeply connected to Arabic – not just as a language, but as a way of thinking. The structure of Arabic grammar and sentence-building is different. Everything passes through the same portals. It's a democratic language – everything has equal value. You're not creating side notes; you're speaking of everything with the same importance. That was a big inspiration for this work too: the idea that everything matters equally.

***Ihsane* brings together personal mourning, cultural complexity, and spiritual reflection. In crafting the work, how did your understanding of forgiveness, loss, and identity evolve – and how did the encounter with the family of *Ihsane*, the victim, shape or deepen the piece's purpose?**

I look at the world in a way that sees it all as one. Sometimes, I realise that what I thought I was talking about isn't actually what I'm talking about – I'm speaking about something else entirely. Very often, in moments of communication, we don't go directly to the point. I find that fascinating, especially when thinking about dance or art in general – forms of communication that open up multiple possibilities of interpretation. I'm not dictating what you're supposed to feel. I'm in a space of exploration – exploring sources, searching for hope for the future. That's my main concern. I'm not a historian. I didn't create a documentary about my father or about *Ihsane*. These stories belong to the past, but they've left a deep emotional imprint on me. They are connected to me in a way that is almost mystical. When I began working on this piece, it was to honour my father. I didn't go to his funeral when I was 18. I regret that. I really think I should have gone. But I had a very complex relationship with him. With age, I came to understand more deeply how difficult existence can be. How hard it is to be a parent, a caretaker. How much society and the people around you treat you differently depending on whether you are a man or a woman, black or white, gay or straight, Arab. You are treated differently. And depending on how you perceive yourself – and how you feel you *should* be treated – there can be a real discrepancy. All of that moved me deeply while I was working on this piece. So, I tried to create something my father would like. I actually asked myself: *What would my father like to see on stage?* – not having had any new information about him for more than 30 years. That's when I came to the concept of *Ihsane* – how to be the best person, the best soul you can be. It's a deeply spiritual term. In a world so devoid of that – in a world driven by greed, self-centeredness, a lack of empathy, where people need help but are judged, where violence is so prevalent –

I found *Ihsane* to be a powerful idea. Just saying the word gives it presence. If you don't say it, it definitely doesn't exist. But if you do, maybe it can become. *Ihsane* is something I want to conjure. I literally want to summon it. Saying the word makes it real. Then I realised that *Ihsane* is also the name of the man who died. I remember thinking about him – he was 33 years old at the time. And when I decided to give the piece that title, the sister of Ihsane contacted me. She said, “I saw that you called your new piece *Ihsane*”.

I asked to meet her. She spoke to me about her brother and her connection to my work. Then she insisted I meet her father. I hadn't known much about him. The journalists hadn't focused on him at the time. But I discovered that he was an Islamic teacher. And when those four Belgian men murdered his son, he responded by founding an organisation against homophobia. I was deeply moved by that. Why don't people talk about this? Why isn't it being highlighted – that a man who lost his son created a foundation against homophobia, and that he comes from Islamic culture? I'm fascinated by that. It breaks every cliché people hold about Arab culture. So, I met him. A lovely man. That family – its mix, its energy – reminded me of my own parents. There I was: a man who had lost his father, facing a man who had lost his son. And we truly connected. I invited him to see the performance. He was incredibly moved by it. The work suddenly meant something to him. I wanted to make it for him. I wanted to make it for people who have experienced loss – especially in a world that minimises certain losses. As if he were somehow to blame for his son's death, which he wasn't. The guilt I saw in his eyes – possibly for having struggled with his son's homosexuality – and the guilt I carry for not going to my father's funeral, for the inability to forgive, or to reciprocate love – was very intense. And deeply moving. As a 49-year-old man, I truly connected with that. In the work, I also wanted to bring to light the different, ongoing crises we experience in Arab cultures. We move from one crisis to the next, quietly. But it's never about the spectacle of suffering that's so often highlighted in the West: “They've been bombed again. Another 300.000 dead”; that constant dehumanisation of the Arab body that we see in the media.

I wanted to offer a celebration – for them, and for us. So, in that sense, this piece is a very gentle rebellion. There’s a real sense of softness. It’s a gentle piece. People leave feeling calm and centred. Some may think it’s boring, because it doesn’t carry the violence they expect – or perhaps even want to see. My response is: you can watch television for that. But the violence *is* there. I’ve just chosen a different form of expression – a de-escalation of violence. A response of kindness to whatever violence has been done to us.

The visual and musical worlds of *Ihsane* are rich with symbolism – from Arabic inscriptions to motifs of light, sun, and growth. How did you work with your collaborators to translate these emotional and spiritual ideas into the sound, costumes, and space of the performance?

The composer Jasser Haj Youssef chose to incorporate rhythms from Morocco as well as from other parts of the Middle East. You might think it all comes from the same world, but in reality, it doesn’t. And yet, he managed to create a sense of unity. That wasn’t an easy task. It’s like placing Italian music next to German music and then next to Spanish music – it’s diverse, and yet he made it flow like a journey. He included traditional elements, but the compositions are his own. He takes inspiration from certain folk traditions – for example, a rhythm – and then he composes a new melody over it. It’s very lyrical, very melancholic. Youssef really captured emotion and brought it to life. It’s music to dance to – and music to feel. What was also unique for this collaboration between Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève and Eastman was the team of contributors. We worked with Amine Bendriouich, a costume designer from Morocco, whose designs carry their own visual language. The costumes have the Arabic word “Nur” written on them, meaning “light”. It’s as if the dancers are protected by these words. The idea wasn’t that they wear the costume, but that the costume carries them – that they are supported by what is outside of them. Amine Amharech, an architect and artist, created the set. He wanted to design a door – an entrance

into the world of the performance, but also something welcoming. Something that feels like a school or a sacred palace. There's also a play of light, with light coming down from above. On this earth, we are all drawn to the light. Just think of people lying on the beach – we're constantly seeking it. Think of the sun salutation. In Islam, you pray facing the East. That attraction to the sun is very literal, very real. It feels almost genetic. He wanted to incorporate a large element of light, almost like a representation of the sun. As if the sun and the lights bring things back into focus – bring them back to life. We work with flowers in the set – flowers that are placed on graves, but also flowers that grow from graves. Whatever happens when someone dies, something will grow out of that. It will grow by taking the water of our tears. All of this forms the foundation of the piece. It's very symbolic. Very poetic.









BIOGRAPHIE

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

CHORÉGRAPHIE

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is a globally celebrated figure like few others in dance today: a brilliant auteur-choreographer, with roughly a hundred and fifty shows and collaborations under his belt, touring all around the planet, and former artistic director of the Royal Ballet of Flanders (2015–22). The Belgian–Moroccan’s choreographic oeuvre overflows with memorable productions, some of which originated in Geneva (*Loin*, 2005) and others on great stages and film sets all over the world (*Puz/zle* at the Avignon Festival in 2012, to name but one). For Marina Abramović’s maiden voyage as scenographer, and with Damien Jalet as co-creator, Cherkaoui’s whirling, shadowy and darkly mechanical interpretation of Ravel’s *Bolero* for the Paris Opera Ballet was a sensation at the Palais Garnier in 2013 and remains one of his most iconic pieces. The trio reformed for *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 2018 at Opera Ballet Vlaanderen; a production which was reprised and live streamed in Geneva. From dancer colleagues to creative partners, Cherkaoui and Jalet form a unique artistic bond: it is only logical that Damien Jalet joined Cherkaoui and the Geneva Ballet as an associate artist.

Grand Théâtre • 26 - 27.02.2026

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Laura Arend

IARA : Ballet pour les amazones
d'hier et d'aujourd'hui



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DISCLAIMER

Some of the images in the production reflect Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's humanist sensitivity. They express a gesture of solidarity with those who suffer, without judgment or opposition, in a spirit of universal compassion.

Impressum

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Impression **Atelier reprographique Ville de Luxembourg**

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