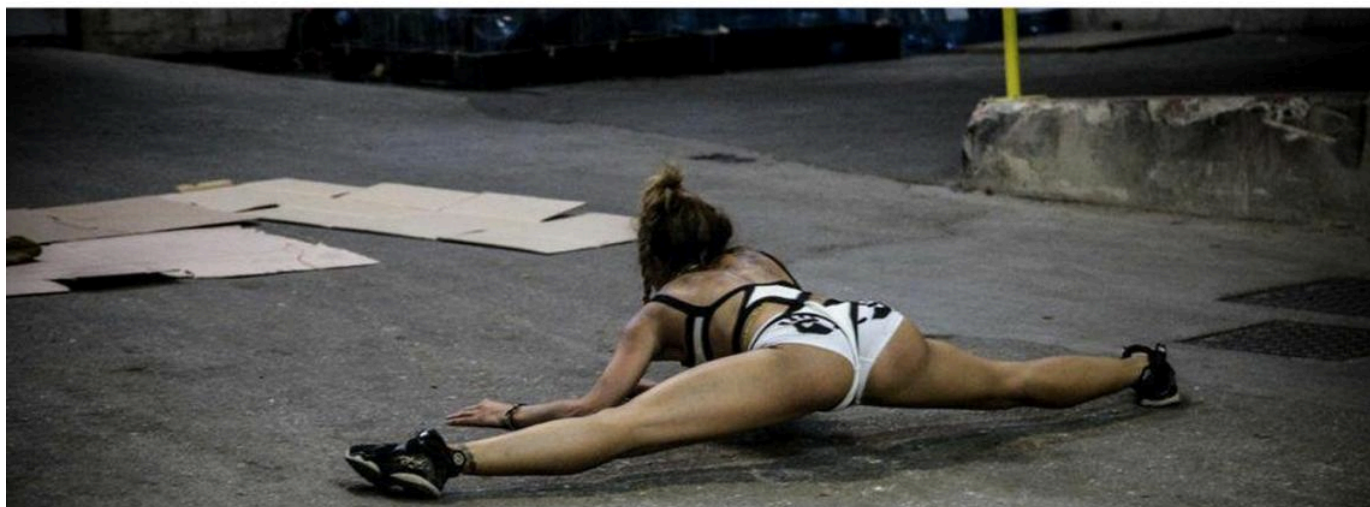


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FEATURE - 05 OCT 2016

## ‘The energy goes through us’

On the occasion of a performance, presented by Frieze Music, The Vinyl Factory and Hayward Gallery, Cecilia Bengolea talks Dancehall and exhaustion

This event was held at The Vinyl Factor and Hayward Gallery's [Party and Performance](#) at The Store on Thursday 6 October 2016. In association with ['#theinfinitemix'](#), a Hayward Gallery off-site exhibition presented in collaboration with The Vinyl Factory at 180 The Strand until Sunday, 4th December.

For this performance, I am working with a range of dancers, from all over the world, and different ages. The youngest is just 11 years old - she's not been to Jamaica yet, but she's already won competitions in Berlin and elsewhere.

I'm partnering her with Karolina, from Sweden, from the group Laces. I met Karolina in Kingston, and I've seen her battle in Berlin. Then there's Erica who will dance with me. They're backgrounds are different, too: some are like ballerinas as much as they are contemporary dancers.



They are different techniques, but classical ballet and Dancehall share some motifs, some forms. Elevation is crucial to both of them. With ballet, it's a concrete kind of elevation - you do it with your ballet shoes, on the toes. Dancehall's aim is a kind of spiritual elevation, even when, with old school, the physical orientation is towards the ground. Whereas with the news school, the emphasis is more upward - there's a lot bouncing and lifting in the moves.

I first went to Jamaica three years ago: I still almost three months every year. Since I started going, the focus has changed - it's really Dancehall everywhere. What has always drawn me to it is how figurative it is. It narrates many things from all aspects of life. Its meaning goes s way beyond sex or killing - it's from the whole of experience, from the spiritual to the humours, and the everyday. Anyone can and does create new steps just from their everyday actions. It's a kind of infinite library; it's limitless.



**Cecilia Bengolea  
& François Chaignaud**

I think of dance as viral - especially Dancehall, which "spreads" worldwide - through clubs, music and now the internet. Like some of my dancers, who have never been to the Caribbean, people can still pick up these trends and movements remotely. It's like a language that you talk - you learn it without having to be in the place it comes from. Some of my dancers I don't know very well, but we can communicate - we immediately understand each other, through this language.

Sometimes I invite choreographers to work with us, but it's always about working in unison. From different parts of the world, we produce one body. There's this element of Dancehall which is about - not aggression, but resistance. In a way, we are fighting together.

There's this kind of dissolution - it's like a stream or a flow, or a train moving, rather than about a specific shape. The energy goes through us. That's why there is a sadness to Dancehall too - we can never stop it, it goes on without us. Sometimes, there's a sense that it's an obligation - you have to keep going, you can't quit, for days and days. It's almost a sickness (another kind of "virus"). Like those stories from medieval times of 'Dancing Plagues', where whole towns would just manically dance until they dropped dead. When you visit Jamaica for research you have to go to every part from Monday to the next Monday. And then you can't sleep! The other poignancy is the ambition in Dancehall - it's a way out of your life, a way to get famous. Everybody wants to be the best, and so you have to be everywhere, and unstoppable.





## Cecilia Bengolea & François Chaignaud

I'm going soon to Thailand to practice Thai Boxing, which I was doing already for some years; I've done some amateur fights here already. I like the fact that it has this "survival" element, just like Dancehall. And there too it's practiced but people who want to become famous, to become rich. They are fighting for their lives. But it's not a straightforward demonstration of strength. For me, it's like meditation. It's a practice that shows the limits of the body, and the same time how to go beyond it.

*As told to Frieze.com*

***Clips selected by Cecilia Bengolea***



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