

**THE Arts**  
The New York Times

*When a Country's Situation Is So Bleak,  
Can Telling a Story Make a Difference?*



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Le Cargo** The Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula performing in this solo show at Gould Hall.

"I am a storyteller," the Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula said to those assembled in Gould Hall on Tuesday night. "But I am not here to tell stories. I am here to dance." In

**BRIAN SEIBERT**

**DANCE REVIEW**

"Le Cargo," his first solo performance, Mr. Linyekula engaged in both activities — and connected them. First he spoke. Sitting on a carved stool, he shared his doubts about whether, after 10 years of creating dances, he had danced at all: whether his contemporary mixes of words and movement, most of them explicitly addressing the despair-inducing recent history of his country, were too topical, too wordy, to count as dance as his ancestors understood it. He also wondered aloud whether those internationally acclaimed works had made any difference.

That second question is one most artists ask themselves, though Mr. Linyekula's background gives standard feelings of futility unusual weight. His answer was representative of his low-key, wised-up charisma. The dances made a difference to him, he said, because he got paid. He could take care of his family,

### *Going home to find a tradition vanished.*

Yet the first question, about what it means to dance, lingered. His quest for an answer, he said, sent him back to Obilo, the village in the Democratic Republic of Congo where he spent part of his childhood. The village had dances for everything back then, but those he was seeking were exclusively for adults, the "night dances" he could only listen to as a child.

Already at this point in the show, his fingers were dancing. Now the rest of his wiry body joined him, moving in a band of light from the right wing. It was a twisting dance of rolling shoulders, limbs swiveling inward, subtle ripples, drops and recoveries. It was an incredibly supple dance that sometimes just rocked to the barely expressed beat in a recording of Flamme Kapaya's electric guitar.

When Mr. Linyekula resumed speaking, it was to inform us, his fingers still going, of his discovery that the dances he sought had

disappeared. The people of Obilo had turned to new sects of Christianity; the greatest drummer was now a pastor. The best Mr. Linyekula could do during his visit, he said, was host a party and see some daytime dances.

Here Mr. Linyekula stepped in a circle of stage lights arranged on the floor. This dance was sparer. It looked like preaching, then like a boxer's warm-up. The lights cast three huge shadows behind him, an ambiguous image of a man connected to his ancestors but also alone and apart.

The sense of loss was strong as the dances and the stories repeated simultaneously, brought together as Mr. Linyekula moved to a recording of what he had earlier said. Into the darkness came thrills of recognition, moments when the dance seemed to match with the stories, illuminating two kinds of storytelling.

By this point, however, Mr. Linyekula was unplugging the lights as a laptop flashed a slide show from his trip home, and the recording reiterated his desire to return to Obilo and dance. By simple means, "Le Cargo" depicted both how he could not go back and how he could take us with him.