

**Dance****Vaison Danes celebrates the evergreen Carolyn Carlson**

The choreographer, 79, made a playful appearance at this summer festival



Carolyn Carlson's 'Wind Women' © Stéphane Renaud

**Laura Cappelle** JULY 25 2022

---

Carolyn Carlson just keeps on dancing. At 79, the American-born choreographer has spent more than six decades travelling from stage to stage, and she barely even stops for curtain calls. At the Vaison Danes summer festival in Vaison-la-Romaine, south-eastern France, which staged a special tribute to her this month, she led her dancers in a playful improvisation midway through the bows: as she pointed, shook a hand, struck a pose, all followed, deferentially.

The evening thoughtfully bridged the gap between generations. Carlson, a *grande dame* of contemporary dance who moved to France in the early 1970s, has created well over 100 works. Still, every piece shown here was made in the 21st century, and two were performed by students from the Cannes Jeune Ballet Rosella Hightower.

*Wind Women* was initially designed to be a solo, but here a lead dancer, the superb Sara Mistrorigo, was followed by a ghostly group of eight others, who repeated her steps. To the sound of breathing and wind chimes, they drifted on their toes, hid their faces behind long hair, then suddenly opened their shoulders skyward. On the open-air stage of Vaison's Roman amphitheatre, they looked as if they were carried by the night-time breeze.

*It's Alright*, a short, offbeat trio created last year for three Cannes dancers,

contrasted wittily. In crisp white shirts and dark pants, the cast shuffled around the stage in a parody of power walking, briefly stopping to interact.



Carolyn Carlson appeared at the end of the evening to perform a 'Prologue' © Stéphane Renaud

The rest of the programme was all solos — Carlson's trademark form throughout her career. Inside a circle of stones, Sara Orselli performed the slightly repetitive *Mandala*, while Riccardo Meneghini reprised *The Seventh Man*, a bravura 38-minute piece inspired by the Hungarian poet Attila József.

With the help of seven shirts and two chairs, Meneghini was by turns powerful and restrained, ardent and introspective. Early on, his limbs darted as if grasping for something that kept vanishing before him. When he crossed his legs and touched his forehead, his body immediately caved in, as if rejecting the everyday simplicity of the poses.

Then, at the very end, Carlson herself emerged in a blue hat for a scene ironically named *Prologue* — a live improvisation with the excellent saxophonist and composer Guillaume Perret, who also performed in *The Seventh Man*. Carlson's upper-body expressiveness and sense of articulation are barely diminished — her arms still tracing intricate images in the air, hands fluttering then suddenly

arms still tracing intricate images in the air, hands fluttering then suddenly opening like a bird's wings.

Seeing Carlson live may become a rare treat as her company focuses on passing down her legacy. Still, if her joyful Vaison encore was any indication, it probably won't be her last.

★★★★☆

*Festival runs to July 26, [vaision-dances.com](https://vaision-dances.com)*

---

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2022. All rights reserved.

---