

CAN DO CAN DANCE

HAMBURGER TANZTAGE MIT ROYSTON MALDOOM (RHYTHM IS IT!)

Interview zwischen Mags Byrne und Nina Pelletier, 10.09.06

When you start working, do you have your choreography in mind or do you look at what the participants bring to you?

[...] I don't always start in the same way. Sometimes, like this time when I came to work I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to do – I had [...] different dances in mind with different pieces of music, and I really wasn't quite sure which one would suite the children better. So I worked with them the first week. [...] I decided on the dance that we did. Only because it was a little slower and the children were very quick and fast and found it very difficult to be slow, so I wanted something where they would have to have quite a lot of control and have a lot of stillness in it, just because I thought that would challenge them. [...] I don't come with a choreographed dance [...], but I tend to have a feeling, or an atmosphere around the piece of music and it usually has, maybe one or two images that are exciting me, or drawing me to it. And in this particular dance, I did have the image of the bird at the beginning and the kind of rolling smoke, when the children are coming in it's that kind of rolling smoke, it's like they are not quite alive, not yet alive, not yet, but some life. [...] The story we are working on tells that they are coming from one world into another world, they are making a journey. [...]

How is the work going on with the children, is it good? And how did you organize the break with 92 children?

The first two days are always challenging. When you don't know the group, and they don't know you, and they don't know what you are expecting of them [...] the children in the first two days were hard work, but it was so wonderful really, we'd spend the day together and they'd be together shouting, and kind of demanding of them together. [...] Which is why, when they were starting to work well, [...] the individual starts to understand what you are looking for. And then it's very important to praise those individuals, so they know, this is the right track, this is the right way to work, this is the way forward from where they stand.

But how is it possible to give everybody of the 92 children the feeling that he/she is important?

I don't think that's difficult; I think you have to make eye contact. You have to look at people, and that's about who you are yourself. [...] When you glaze over, people can see that.

It's not easy with 92 children [...] I think when you start this kind of work to begin with all you can do is be a bit frightened inside and see a lot of children, but with a little more experience you are able to relax inside, which means you can make that contact.

What else do you think is important for the children's motivation and how do you win them for the idea of "dance"? Not all the children might be so happy with dance.

I think each group and each child is different, as we all. [...] I don't think it's possible to win all the individuals over. Some children will go away from this experience – I hope, most children – having had a fantastic time. They'll have worked very hard, and they won't realize what's going to happen, they won't realize the whole experience until after the performances.

After the first performance they'll get their first sense of why they were working so hard, and then that fantastic feeling afterwards when people stand up and clap at you, the sense of yourself that grows, because all the people are saying: Wow, that was great! [...] I really believe in the work, I

really believe in the power of dance to make changes in individuals and in communities. I think you have to believe in what you do, and that's what the children respond to: they respond to your passion. [...] The dance is powerful, but a lot of it is about the teaching. [...] I think when you are clear yourself, and you fully believe yourself, then they are prepared to travel the road with you to find out what it is.

You mentioned your manner of teaching, and you said it's very important to use your voice, because children hear this a lot. Can you say something about it?

I think so much of our communication is not in the words that we use. For example, I think if you take away the words, you can still communicate. [...] Now when it comes to the voice, so much of what we hear in the voice is in the intonation, in the tone of the voice. [...] And if you were to ever use just one word, you can still communicate. You can communicate a hell of a lot through one word, because it's the tone. And then, as I say, when you are at that with the physical body, you realize that more than 50 % of our communication is not about words. [...] When you are a teacher, you have to be conscious of that, to be conscious of when you speak loud, when you speak quietly. When you are drawing a word, when you are emphasizing something, the voice has to change, and if you speak in a monotone voice, without any emphasis, or without any sense, then people stop listening. [...]

How is it possible after such a long time to still have this passion, and where do you get the power for it?

It's interesting, because somebody asked me the other night, she was a mother of small children, and she was just saying: Where does the energy come from? Because undoubtedly I get up some days the same as everybody does, and I am tired for whatever reason, and I have to kind of braise myself, and take a deep breath. Sometimes I use music, I put on a piece of music that I like to start off, but the real energy comes from the interaction with the children. Again there is a saying that says: Energy creates energy. And it's true. If you bring energy to the children, they will give you back energy as well. [...] That's what fuels me, not only my energy, but my passion for the interaction with the people I am working with. I give, and they give me something back, too! [...] With the children I am working with in St. Pauli, there is so much energy. And you give the energy, but it comes back. And you end up being excited, and they end up being excited at the end of a class. And you kind of feed from each other.

Great, thanks a lot! Do you want to say anything else about your work, about community dance?

I suppose the only thing I want to say is that it's not one thing. Community dance, or dance in all aspects, is not one thing. It's many things to many people and many people work in very different ways. [...] And I think it would be wrong to think that there is just one way, it would be limited to think that. And I certainly don't think that – I have a way of teaching, and I have a methodology in teaching, but I know people who work in the same field as myself who work quite differently, but have fantastic results as well, so certainly for dancers and dance teachers, it's to try and be generous, to try and be open, to try and recognize that there is space for everybody. [...] I think there is something, if we don't open the space for ourselves, then we almost close it for the community. Because if we closed ourselves, people cannot find a way in, it's more difficult to find something for themselves the.