

# CAN DO CAN DANCE

## HAMBURGER TANZTAGE MIT ROYSTON MALDOOM (RHYTHM IS IT!)

Interview zwischen Royston Maldoom und Nina Pelletier, 13.09.06

**I know you from the project in Potsdam and from “Rhythm is it!”, and now you are here in Hamburg. How do you feel working in Hamburg, do you feel accepted with the message you want to give? Do you see a difference from the starting point of the project until now after three weeks?**

When I came I wasn't sure [...] of how people would react to the project. My aim really was to try to give people in Hamburg, people who wanted to work in the field an overview of community dance as we understood it in the U.K. Because I think in the U.K. it's a concept which is now well established and understood [...] I thought it might be useful if people were saying to me: Well, what is community dance? What do you mean by community dance? So I thought if I bring various colleagues who have been through the whole process, perhaps really from the beginning of the community dance movement until now, what they might discover is that although we have different working methods that we come from the same philosophy [...]

So when I came, I was a little bit nervous about it, I didn't know how people would react, but one of the things that I realized very quickly, there was a tremendous interest, [...] and that people are really ready, but they are not sure how to progress. And that they tend to be very isolated. So I am also very happy to see how people have come together, and spent time together and seem ready to ask questions to observe, and also they have been very generous to us [...]

**Do you feel that your work was already known before you came to Hamburg?**

Well, of course, I was here last year, so people already knew me, and yes, people knew me from the film, they probably had a good idea of what to expect from me. [...] And certainly I just feel very welcome everywhere I go, it's not just in the streets where people recognize me almost every day, but I feel very much at home, that's quite a strange feeling. [...] I just get the feeling that whatever it is I am doing, is something that people are beginning to tune into. And it seems to strike a cord with them.

**Do you feel that you and the work are supported enough in Germany? Are there lacks of support, and those helping structures – are they different in this project than in other ones?**

In terms of the support to the project Can Do Can Dance I can say this is the best supported and best structured project that I have had in Germany. And I think it comes from the fact that it's very clear to me that Jutta Schubert (from kontext kulturproduktionen) was not as in many projects just interested in me and my name and my position and my, let's say, the fact that I am kind of quite famous in Germany at the moment, generally. I get the feeling sometimes that people would like to use my name simply to maybe help to promote their own work or their own organization. But it was very clear very early on that Jutta and her organization are quite committed to this work. [...] I now feel there's a real partnership between the artists and the organization.

**So kontext kulturproduktionen invited you because they want to establish community dance in Hamburg. Do you think that the local structures for this development are already given can you give us some good advice?**

The only thing that I and my colleagues really offer are some kind of models that we've seen that work in the U.K. The most important thing is that whatever it is, has to be home grown. It's difficult to say where the structures exist, I think the structures probably exist that could be adapted to provide an infrastructure for community dance activity and community dance work.

But I think at the moment there are a lot of issues that have to be bruised after, and I think one of the most important issues is: where does community dance lie in relation to, for instance, education and professional dance. [...] It's also going to mean that people are really going to have to network, there is really going to have to be a vision, which can be sold, to funders, to the city, to the state, and

at the moment there is probably not a coherent vision. It's going to take time to bring everybody together for all aspects of the dance world that exists here, to realize this could be something that's of benefit to everybody. [...] culture is underfunded in your society the same as in ours. It's role, I think, is not fully understood, has not been explored, researched enough – or, if it has been researched enough, is not acted on enough. [...] And I think the most important thing is that people will have to demonstrate demand. [...] I mean, if people are not demanding cultural activity, then the culture politicians or the funders may not be stimulated to provide the opportunities. [...]

**Your description seems like the fact that the important point is the work itself is not always recognized in Germany. Is there anything else which is not supporting your work enough here?**

[...] One of the problems that I have is, that I am very closely associated with this move to bring dance into schools. And I support this in principle, but I don't think it's the answer. [...]. I know that everybody feels there are problems with the school system, problems with the education, and I absolutely agree, and I think it's not just here but in many places in the developed world. I think there are serious problems we have to look at, but dance is not going to save schools, is not going to save the system. [...] There is no doubt it can have an effect, but then it will only have an effect if it is well done. [...] And I think where I want to see dance is out where people are, in the community. Because kids spend not so much time in school actually, they spend most of the time out of school. And most of the difficulties or all life-experiences that they come up against, are experiences that are happening outside the school building, outside the playground. [...] and also, it's not just school children who have difficulties in life, or school children who don't have enough access to cultural activity. It's a population a majority of whom are not in school. [...]

**Do you feel that German institutions, like cultural administration or school institutions recognize this demand or that they understand it?**

I am not sure whether everyone has understood that the thrust of my work and the thrust of my interest is dance art. One of the things in the film is that, maybe it's the way the film is made, but people seem to have latched onto the pedagogic aspect quite strongly of what I am doing, and I worry that they think there is this kind of pedagogue who is using dance, and they are not quite realizing that there is a professional choreographer, or a choreographer/dancer who is hopefully achieving pedagogic outcomes [...]. It's that introduction to the cultural art form that I am really interested in. [...] Because if we are serious about developing a dance culture [...]for everybody in the community, we are going to have to have more and more inspired, working creative independent dance artists. [...] So I think that it's going to be quite hard as well for the establishment and for the funders and the government and the state to take on that if they were to increase funding for dance or culture in education, they would actually have to increase their cultural funding as well, for artists.

**What do you wish your assistants to continue the work?**

I am hoping that from each of the projects we have done, there is somebody who will want to continue, I am hoping that all the institutions we have worked with, [...] because the artists can't do it on their own. This maybe is provided free of charge, but it's an economic thing as well. You can find that this is worth to be continued, but then there is a job to do which is to go out and to persuade the education authority and the school or the parents to support it and to get financial support and structural support, so it's a relationship between the young artists who are prepared to take the challenge and continue and the institutions themselves working together. [...] But those partnerships have to be developed. And I hope that through the performance and the publicity, other schools, other institutions, other workshops will take an interest and say: That could work for us as well. The next stage I think is for those leaders in the community, the school heads and the community leaders if you like, or those who are responsible for welfare of the community, if they think this is valuable, to get the word out to get together, too, and say, we want this for the people, we want this support this for the community, and to lobby and to be heard. If nobody lobbies, then why should anyone listen?