

CAN DO CAN DANCE

HAMBURGER TANZTAGE MIT ROYSTON MALDOOM (RHYTHM IS IT!)

Interview zwischen Susannah Broughton und Nina Pelletier, 01.09.2006

When you started working you didn't have the images you were going to work with – did you rather develop them while you were working?

I did have a few ideas and images when I first came here, but when you start to work with a group, the first thing you have to do as a choreographer and as an artist is to see which images they respond to with energy. [...] It was great for me, because for the first few days we did workshops and played with the ideas, and I had the time to really look at their different energies and have fun to see what I could use and what we needed to work on from the group as a whole.

Did you know the music when you started to work with the seniors?

Yes, I had an idea of the music. Before I came to Hamburg I thought I needed to make some decisions before I came, so there were a few pieces that I had in mind.

What is necessary for a successful cooperation, especially with seniors?

Well, I think you have to really work with any group that you are working with. [...] I think with this particular group I have been very lucky [...]. We just had a really good rapport between us, it was a great atmosphere. [...] They may test you a lot more and you have to earn a certain amount of trust or respect. And so you just go with the group and work with them, but you don't always expect such a good relationship that can at times develop. It develops at different stages in different groups.

Participants said that they really liked the atmosphere in the rehearsals, and that it was your life experience that enabled you to accept them the way they were. From your professional point of view, could you describe your attitude towards the participants?

I don't have a particular method or way of working, I just work with people. [...] I don't see them as a particular group, I don't see any kind of separation between us and I'm trying to find out with all the groups I work with, whatever age they are, you have to just engage with them. It is a human thing really.

Is there a special fascination in working with people you haven't casted before, with non-professional dancers?

Yes. I mean working in the area that I work in, in community dance I love working with people who are not trained. I really love working with what I call a rough body. A body that hasn't got the discipline a dancer has. Because there is such a different kind of movement that could come out. [...] I love to work with bodies that maybe haven't danced a lot or experienced that kind of work before.

Do you feel that you can get to know more about life from these bodies? Is it rather about having something true to life, that you get the information from them?

I think it's really the case of that the body is not trained. They sometimes respond in a way that you wouldn't expect. I don't know what that connection to life is, but sometimes you can get it with dancers, I think, that it has to look a specific way or they are very keen on a certain aesthetic. [...] Extremes are more accessible in a body that is just responding, rather than coming from a discipline that is trained.

How important is technique for you?

It is not important for me. I don't want them to be technical beyond the very basic thing of being able to be safe in the body, so they are working with safety. [...] In the past I've worked with dancers and then you can really play with technique. But with groups like this, I want them to be more conscious about how they feel and how they respond and show the feeling. That is what I'm interested in.

[...] So you think you are giving them confidence, because you are giving them a structure in which they can move?

It is about giving them a piece and working on that piece, so that they feel they know it. Also I give them little skills and pointers throughout the piece of how to make yourself confident. They will obviously be nervous those who have not performed before. [...]

So that they can have fun and enjoy it and show the powerful side of them rather than the nervous side.

And what is lovely about the project is that it gives them an opportunity to do this, because sometimes they want to do it, but there is no chance of where to go to learn dances at their age which are not maybe more traditional or directed as stereotypical older people's kind of dance. [...]

Could you describe the way you get the balance between leading the group and giving them the opportunity to create something on their own?

[...] There is no material that I have choreographed, all of it comes from the workshops that they have done. So all I have done is to set a structure of coming on and off, where to go and how to get there. [...] So with this particular piece, I think there are whole sections they have created and taught each other, and sections that are improvised. [...] And what I have given them is an impetus and an idea on which to base that work. And my job is to weave it together.

At what point did you decide to put the wrapping images in the group?

It is an image that I actually had before I came here. [...] I thought about some possibilities with the music and the music inspired the image, so I just wanted to see whether or not it would work. [...] But they seemed to have so much fun with it and it was so lovely to see quite a kind of chaotic sparky image, I thought 'great, let's go with it'.

I want to come back to the point of improvisation. Because one woman said that she loved it so much to see that you also have questions in your eyes about what the piece is going to be. And they like this moment of uncertainty.

So that is great, because what happens then is a kind of process from a similar footing. Because I don't know what's going to happen and they certainly don't. [...] And so I tried to make sure that they knew that within the way that I work on that particular piece, we would be kind of piecing it together. So we were really working on it as an ensemble and not with me thinking I know exactly what I'm going to do and I'm going to put it on you. [...]

Do you think it is an important key of the work that they feel proud of it in the end?

Yes, I think so. I don't want them to come on stage feeling that they were embarrassed by it, that they didn't find anything to enjoy. [...] You try as hard as you can to make it a good experience for them, and pride plays a very large part in that experience.

What I'm hoping for is that after this they will continue and there may not necessarily be another performance for weeks or month or maybe another year. [...] So, if some of them can continue to dance and explore, to do workshops and continue moving after this, I find it fantastic, but sometimes it's great as well to have the performance because that gives it a real drive. It gives the process a real motivation, so both are important.