

CAN DO CAN DANCE

HAMBURGER TANZTAGE MIT ROYSTON MALDOOM (RHYTHM IS IT!)

Interview zwischen Tamara McLorg and Nina Pelletier, 13.09.2006

I noticed that you were emotionally touched by the film of Royston Maldoom and by himself. That it is most important for you in working together with Royston Maldoom for such a long time.

It's quite difficult for me to answer really, because we have worked together for such a long time, and we have worked together from the very beginnings, so I feel that we have grown quite a lot together. [...] And I suppose now for me, apart from the deep friendship, but on a professional level, it's important that I have someone who I can go to and who I can ask some advice, and if I am not sure about something, show my weaknesses, too. That's really important, because we all need somebody who is ahead of us, or somebody who is the teacher.

What are the most important aspects you can get from Royston concerning your work, the ideas?

I think Royston and I fundamentally have the same philosophy, regarding not only community dance, but regarding dance in general and about life. I think choreographically, when I look at Royston's work, we come from very much the same source from inside ourselves [...] And that has been a strong connection. When we have worked together, it makes a really good balance. I truly respect him as a choreographer, first and foremost. [...]. And first I have known Royston as a choreographer before being a community dance artist. In the very early, early days, when we were young choreographers together, and I danced in his pieces as well as my choreographies were in the same programmes as him. So fundamentally we have met as a choreographer and through that the friendship has grown.

I think there must also be quite a difference to other choreographers with whom you work well together, but not for such a long time.

I do have other artists that I have worked with for a long time, and I tend to collaborate. Once I work well with somebody, I like to collaborate with them over a length of time, because I feel that actually you can travel along a path together and you get to know each other very well, so that when you are in a working situation, particularly a stressful or a pressurized situation, you can rely on each other. But first and foremost it's always come through the respect for their work [...] I think Royston is one of the longest that I have had associations with. Where you build long-term relationships, you work and you go to different projects and you come back to do one and then you go off and do things, but you constantly stay in touch. [...]

I have seen several films in the cinema – not only yours, but also Gerda König's, Janice Parker's and Royston Maldoom's, and I have seen parallels, but also differences. For me it was like seeing that all of you have an individual way of teaching, of choreographing, of sharing time together with people depending on your individuality and depending on the group with whom you are working. Could you describe which was your way to find your individual style of working, of choreographing?

I think you are who you are, and I think it is a process that happens which you are not even particularly aware of. Maybe now. [...] When you look at all the people you have mentioned, and you look at their personalities, the way they work has very much to do with their personalities as well [...] I think we all have the same believes, we just may come to them in a slightly different way. I think it becomes dangerous to try to copy somebody else. And really for me it's about communication. [...] And you never know when you go in a room with a group of new people, how it's going to develop.

And that is an adrenalin base, because you are nervous every time, because it is a completely new situation. [...] it becomes a challenge. "Can you make it work, can you make it work that it's right for them?" And there are lots of areas around that obviously, in your own personal life, what the room is like, language, culture, there's lots of other issues that become involved. I work and therefore speak through the work, the choreography.

You mentioned it is about communication. The communication with this group in Hamburg – what is it about? What was the key for working with this group, what was your experience with them? Or the most important experience for them, did they get the idea dance and to be motivated?

I can't really speak for them, you would have to ask them. I have no idea what they think, because I haven't really spoken with them, because my main preoccupation has been making the work. [...] I keep a slight distance. I am trying to reach them or communicate with them through the movement, not by becoming their friends or chatting or a discussion. It's a completely different level that you are communicating on. [...]

I say rules, because with the young girls we have kind of had to develop the discipline – a lot of talking, a lot of giggling. In the first day I was tested. They always test you, until eventually you hopefully get them on your side. I don't know whether they realized it, but I think the piece has been a challenge for them. Because they are really strong girls. [...]

o And that's hard, because what they are asking you to be is actually very vulnerable. Particularly in the second section of the piece, where they have done a very slow section. You are making demands on them, which is about showing who they are underneath all this kind of strong exterior, and that's part of the process. [...]

Do you see any parallels or differences between your work here and your work in other countries?

[...] In actual fact I see what's similar. You have the slight culture differences, but in actual fact young people are the same everywhere. People are the same, they laugh, they hate, they get angry, and if you find those places, we all have the same spirit, the same souls, so it's about finding that place of communication. So actually, it's not that different. [...] It's amazing, because whenever you go somewhere, it can be very different, but when you actually start working, it's not different at all. I am in the situation and I am leading it, so therefore I am starting with something that I know very well, and then we start the journey. [...] I start where I am and then share what they give me, where the exchange or the collaboration starts.

So if I understood you right, when you come into a group, you already have a certain idea of a choreography in your mind and then you start? Do you take what they give you and then develop the images?

Usually when I go somewhere I don't really know what I am doing, and I often feel stupid when people ask, what is it about? And I always say, I don't know. I might have some images, but that's my security. But usually by the time I have finished, they have gone. [...] And then we started the piece. But there are certain ways I run the rehearsal to start with. I start with a warm-up, with the movement, which gives me security. But that's for my own security really, because I feel comfortable with that. Somebody else might start with something else, and that's what I mean when I say that everybody has their individual way of working. But I usually don't have a set idea.

You mentioned that after the first rehearsal the images had gone, but on the second day you started. How did you start then?

[...] We didn't do a lot of creative work, it didn't work. I asked them to do some actions, but they didn't have much of the vocabulary and a lot of time was spent just controlling the group. I see that as well by the way they perform, it helps me to decide where I go next. With particular pieces, it's quite important to have it structured. Originally I wanted to have a solo, and I wanted to have a duett, but I felt for this group it would not have been appropriate. I felt if I had done a solo, I would

have had to give everyone a solo or a duett. It would have been quite destructive for the group. [...] I thought it was really important that they would become strong as a group and support each other. That's an idea that completely went in the process. [...]

Do you want to say anything else, do you have a message?

I think just to finish off, I think it's absolutely extraordinary what has happened. And I think the organizers of Can Do Can Dance have been extraordinary when you think what has happened in such a short time with the laboratory, with the workshops for people outside, with the workshops for the assistants. My assistants have actually been fantastic, I have really enjoyed working with them. [...] I hope [...] that through the discussions and the laboratory people actually start networking. Because that's the important part, to actually take on and continue.

Do you feel that enough structure has grown in the three weeks for it to go on?

It's difficult for me to say, because really I have only been doing my little bit, and I think with those things it's always difficult to know. [...] It doesn't need a lot of people, but you need people who have the passion and have the want for it to continue. [...]

We hope that it will continue. Maybe you will come back and give some new impulses...

I'd love to. I am hoping the assistant who is going to take over my goals is going to send me a bit of my glorie and hope he is amazing. That's what I am hoping.