

animated

The National Community Dance Magazine

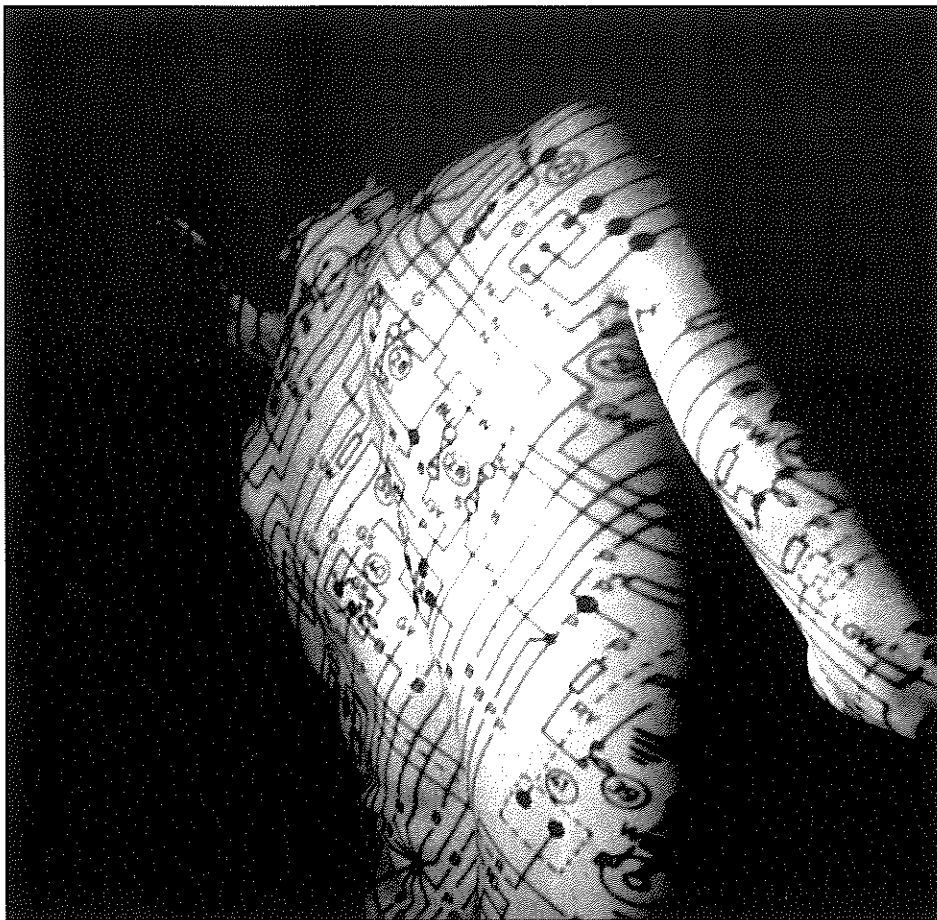
Spring 1998
£2.50

lottery milestones

hothouses

Being part of The Place's Associate Artists Scheme is a bit like being put in a hothouse environment, given lots of light and nutrients, and an opportunity to grow and develop new roots. The success or failure of the scheme however, will depend upon the survival rate of artists once they leave the hothouse.

Carol Brown explains



SHELLEY O'CONNOR

nomads navigators and hothouses

It is well known that a dancer's survival depends upon a multi-faceted approach to managing one's career. It is not enough to be an able choreographer and performer, if one is to get the work seen and perceived, funded and promoted, structures of support and administration are needed. I was invited to join the Associate Artists Scheme at The Place Theatre in London in August 1997. The invitation came at a good time. Whilst I have been choreographing and performing for some years, performances were infrequent, funding almost non-existent, and the work not widely known outside of London and Surrey.

My own route to becoming a dancer, was an unusual one, in that I grew up in New Zealand where I studied Tanztheater, went on to study for an MA and eventually a PhD in Choreography in the UK, and have lived and worked for extended periods of time on both sides of the world as a choreographer and dancer. In my experience, being a dancer is also about being a nomad; one is constantly moving or thinking about movement, and also making routes to where the resources and sus-

tenance are for this work to occur. However, nomadic lifestyles require mechanisms of travel: navigators, bases, bridges, map readers and compass bearers.

Though I have travelled widely I am constantly getting lost in the conflicting demands of my career and, with the drive to make new work surging on but no infrastructure to support and sustain this activity, it can feel as though my tracks are constantly erased in the sand. The Associate Artists Scheme provides the markers, the maps and the compass readers, I still have to do the moving, but at least I know that decisions about where to go and how to get there are based upon an overall plan which has a certain logic, rather than the random ad hoc excursions of the past.

Support for one's work is essential to its ongoing development. The Associate Artists office is equipped with computers, a photocopier, access to fax and email facility and telephones. Associate Artists also have access to The Place Dance Services extensive data base and information network regarding venues, promoters and funding initiatives. When I joined

the scheme, although there was no direct administrative support, Theresa Beattie and Emma Gladstone offered advice and took a direct interest in the artists and Anna Masters was always on hand to assist with computing needs and general information. Since January 1998, thanks to a successful Lottery application, The Place employed Barbra Egervary as an administrator and Brenton Surgenor as an administrative advisor specifically for the Associate Artists. This means that I now have administrative support for the equivalent of one day per week as well as an adviser who can help steer future excursions and keep me on course.

Being inside one's own work as a performer and choreographer is physically, emotionally and intellectually demanding. Having to also write the applications, phone the venue managers, negotiate the fees and map the tours requires different sets of skills, and in my own case, the priority has always been time in the studio. However, one's career reaches a stage where if it is to move on as a sustainable and dynamic activity it must also have the maps

and resources to do so. Egervary has recognised the need for providing Associate Artists with the resources to enable bridges to be made between creators and programmers, performers and audiences, choreographers and funders. She has created a promotional package for my own work and is making links with programmers in Central and Eastern Europe, and the UK. As an artist, I have always found it difficult to think beyond the current project, which can be a totally consuming endeavour. However, Surgenor's role has been to act as something of a compass reader, assessing my own aspirations as an artist and negotiating routes for further excursions and incursions in the cultural realm of performance. Being able to see beyond the current project is a necessary strategy for survival if one is to avoid potholes and running out of fuel!

To have the support of The Place is a privilege and a huge boost for a freelance Independent choreographer. When I joined the scheme I recall asking Director, John Ashford, what he personally perceived to be the benefits of the scheme. His response was that The Place, whilst being an artistic establishment, was also a bureaucracy and that by physically bringing working artists into the offices there was a constant traffic in culture which kept alive its 'raison d'être'. Like any bureaucracy there is a

“Being a dancer is also about being a nomad... constantly moving or thinking about movement and also making routes to where the resources and sustenance are.”

risk that the amassing of paperwork and desk culture overwhelms the purpose of the project itself, that is, movements in culture through bodies that are informed and locatable, physical and cultural entities.

Having the assistance of an administrator and adviser and a base, enables me to get on with the process of making and performing

my work within a supportive environment. However, I am well aware that this unique set of circumstances will come to an end in September when a new set of choreographers will be invited to join the scheme. Yet I feel positive that by then I will be on a more secure footing as an Independent artist, able to read the maps currently being made and move in new directions with the resources to guide me. Part of the scheme involves training artists to make these connections themselves and to be equipped with the skills to negotiate their own career pathways. This would seem a very necessary thing, given the competing demands of the performance world.

Nothing grows in the dark. Being part of the Associate Artists Scheme feels a bit like being put in a hothouse environment, given lots of light and nutrients, and an opportunity to grow and develop new roots. The success or failure of the scheme however, will depend upon the survival rate of artists once they leave the hothouse. It is hoped that the experience of being an Associate Artist will equip them with resilient fibres and strong roots, capable of finding their own light sources and getting what they need not just to survive, but to thrive.

Carol Brown, Associate Artist, The Place Theatre.

Dundee COLLEGE

First Choice for Dance

The Scottish School of Contemporary Dance

Following our Lottery Award, we will be auditioning for our next course in May 1998.

For an application form or for further details

please call 01382 834834

Come and be part of a major new force in British dance.



DUNDEE COLLEGE
PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY TRAINING & EDUCATION



Dundee COLLEGE
YOUR first CHOICE

<http://www.dundeeoll.ac.uk> Email: enquiry@dundeecoll.ac.uk

