

February 12, 2009

Dear Chair of LUTSF

I am enclosing a disc with a copy of this letter and the report along with a copy of a recording of a rehearsal in Italy. I did send you a copy of this last year and have been away a substantial amount of time since then so I am sorry you did not receive this earlier. I understand this causes you problems and apologise both for myself and the postal system for causing you both the effort of writing to me and the distress it has caused.

I myself am struggling to survive at this moment in time and have to confess to not always being on top of things, but if you feel that my behaviour warrants it I am quite happy to return the money if it seems to you that I have not fulfilled my obligations.

For the record the trip was successful although it has, since then, been impossible to secure funding for further work so it would seem like this particular project will not continue. I hope this finds you well and once more, do apologise for any inconvenience caused by the report being late.

All the best

Wendy Houstoun

RESIDENCY AT OPERAESTATE FESTIVAL VENETO,
BASSANO DEL GRAPPA, ITALY.
MAY 8TH-18TH, 2008.

The residency successfully achieved the purposes of spending extended and intensive time in the theatre to research early stages of work in connection with translation. It also successfully developed work with Matteo Fargion and developed a working relationship between us. The project was useful in that it has created further opportunities in Italy and also started a mentoring relationship with local choreographers. Unfortunately it has not created more opportunity for Matteo and I to work together as funding and support has proved difficult, as the residencies are unpaid while they are great things to be offered but hard to afford in the current climate.

Having said that, the residencies are great in creating a supportive voice. The highlight of the journey was perhaps seeing Venice for the first time, travelling through the countryside to Bassano and learning about the history of Bassano - as it was a frontline place of battle in the second world war between the resistance and the nazis.

I have no suggestions for future awardees.

We have been trying for a year to find support for this project but it is proving hard.

REPORT

The trip to Bassano was a 10-day residency offered by Roberto Casarotto from OperaState Festival. The residency was for the purpose of researching and starting a new piece. The first day was spent in Venice mentoring 5 choreographers on a choreographic programme at Teatro Fondamenta Nuovo. This was an intensive day watching the pieces and giving feedback. There was a good connection made between the choreographers and there was a request from them all for me to return at some later date to work more with them.

Initially, the whole time would have been in Bassano but there was a celebration of the Alpini - a mountain regiment of the Italian army who celebrated the defence of a bridge on Bassano in the 2nd world war - so the first two days were spent outside the city waiting for the drinking and marching to stop.

After working in a studio outside Bassano on early ideas for a solo piece the next 6 days were spent at the Teatra Astra in Bassano working with Matteo Fargion.

We had sole use of this theatre (an old theatre that has been adapted into a cinema in and is now awaiting restoration. It was decorated with Italian flags left over from the weekend - echoes of the Italian fascism mixed with old theatre, a very strange combination. The theatre too was dark, quite cold, and had resident bats in the eaves and tended to leak when raining, but on emerging out for a break the view was breathtaking. Looking straight at the mountains capped with snow - which were the start of the Dolomites. A good contrast.

Over the 6 days in the theatre Matteo and I were trying to arrive at the beginning of a piece. Although we knew each other socially we hadn't worked together before and our backgrounds are very different. Over the days we were trying to find ways to combine his formal compositional approach with my looser more theatrical approaches. We started two different ideas, which ran aground quite quick but then decided to stick with a formal approach to an idea, which combined text, music and some very basic action.

For me this trip has been really important. I have for ages been aware of lacking any vocabulary to deal with structural notions and been aware that my own work lacks a method of formally developing single ideas. I was keen from the start to think of staying with one idea and building the complexity rather than my usual method of attack, which tends to come up with a lot of ideas and skims through them all. Because of the way Matteo would talk about building a piece and the language he had for criticism I felt I was being introduced to a new way of thinking and this was really satisfying. Perhaps the main thing I noticed was the idea of staying within the confines of an idea and finding ways to get change happening within these confines.

On the Sunday evening there was a public showing. The people that attended were a combination of interested people from Bassano, writers and lighting designers from Vicenza, choreographers that I had worked with in Venice, and people from the OperaState Festival. We showed 15 minutes of what we had done and had a discussion afterwards. It was great that Matteo is Italian as he was able to make the discussion possible.

In following conversations with Roberto - we are now talking about how, where and when to follow up this work. It is possible that there will be an invitation to work in Venice with Matteo on the development of this piece. It is possible that I will return to see the showings of the choreographers in June. It is definite that I will be performing in the festival in August.

I think this residency has been very important for me. I have been in conversation with Roberto for many years now about collaborations. It has come at a time when working in England is becoming very difficult, if not unsustainable and the possibility of finding a supporter for future work really helps both the practical thing of working but also the psychological thing of having someone who supports the work - and also someone who is in a position to help both with resources and also with making contacts.

The trip was followed up with another try out of a performance in August (footage accompanying report) and also the offer of another residency in Venice in May 2009.

Wendy Houston