

Dear Chair of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund,

Please, find enclosed two copies of my report of the project I carried out during the months of February to April 2005 in Florianópolis, Brazil. I am sending a floppy disk with the report and a DVD with a video displaying training, dance classes, rehearsals and the different scenes that will help understand how we devised the project. Also enclosed is a letter from the Laoviah school's director certifying my completion of the residency.

This experience made possible by LUTSF will be unforgettable. I am very grateful to the Fund for this amazing opportunity.

Ana

## **REPORT**

### **"AERIAL LAB."**

An aerial theatre experience in Brazil. Feb-April.2005

#### ***How all began...***

As a foreword I would like to define what "aerial theatre" means to me. Aerial theatre is an innovative concept of theatre, pioneered by the Argentinean Company De La Guarda, ([www.delaguarda.com](http://www.delaguarda.com)), this company has been investigating this approach for over a decade. This technique allows the creation of any Performing Art, (dance, physical theatre, opera, etc.) while breaking the law of gravity.

Aerial theatre is based on climbing techniques, the same ropes, special harnesses, safety and control systems are used to support the performer. Patricia is the director of Laoviah School. I first met her in London in year 2000. She was then working for De La Guarda which was successfully performing in London throughout that year. When the tour finished a group of climbers (including Patricia and Iñaki) and performers created "Shinjinru", an aerial theatre company. For three years I worked with them on lighting design, stage management and scenography, while training as a dancer. Although I decided then to focus my creativity and passion on dance, I had always the curiosity to apply my choreographic and dance skills to aerial theatre.

From the moment Patricia set up the school two years ago in Florianópolis, I had been dreaming to go and work with her. She invited me and my partner Iñaki, (an aerial expert himself) to share some time and knowledge with her. This was the perfect opportunity to fulfil my long time dream and widen my artistic vision through an exploration of aerial theatre.

#### ***Once there...***

We arrived at Florianópolis on a hot afternoon on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April and although we didn't plan it ahead, an unexpected arrangement with Patricia led us to Buenos Aires. There we met her 86 years old father Angel, who inspired my initial idea of "the miracle". Patricia shared with me her dream of making her disabled father fly with ropes. We decided then to make it happen.

Wherever I travel I like to check the local dance schools and try out some classes. In Buenos Aires I took every possible tango classes. I fell in love with the music, which actually became the main soundtrack for the project. A male teacher who has been dancing for over sixty years, taught me the basic tango steps and the secrets of the most passionate and delicate dance. We were invited to observe an aerial acrobatics class using harnesses in "Redes" circus school. We met the teacher and exchanged useful information.

After this inspiring trip, we went back to Florianópolis and started working on ideas, planning and scheduling the project. On the first day, I discovered a Capoeira Angola school. The teacher invited us to a "roda", kind of capoeira ritual based on improvisation of dance and music. I was very pleased to make contact with other dancers and performers and approach the philosophy of this ancestral type of capoeira by attending their classes twice a week. I imagined those movements could work very well with ropes and I decided to incorporate capoeira in one of our pieces, I could already visualize at that stage a tango-capoeira peculiar mix to become the fruit of our work.

I wanted to ground my research on the Azorean. This autochthon culture is the heritage from the Portuguese colonization during the XVIII century. I visited the library and the Drama university, UDESC, and research about local legends, fairytales and any other sources that could help me define the aesthetics of the project. What struck me most was the strong presence of ancestral credence which had survived the conversion to Catholicism. This fusion of beliefs is still fully alive in the Brazilian culture. This very peculiarity of the Brazilian tinted my vision of "the miracle".

#### ***Memories...***

"... We had a meeting this morning and wrote down the scheme of work. Patricia gave us the induction and safety instructions: check of the climber before starting any aerial work; use of double security; body, space and rope awareness; clarifying the "warning sign" in case anything goes wrong; performers and visitors round rules for safety, meals and warm ups advices, etc."

"... It is the first class and after the yoga- based warm up, we explore initial movements: sensing the harness, low-level motion, up-side down and horizontal stance, circling on the air ... Originally, I had in mind to train everyday, but after three hours session I was feeling the tightness of the harness and the rope tension imprinted on all the muscles that I knew and the ones I discovered! I never had this kind of massive ache all over my body. I quickly understood what Patricia was suggesting about training three days a week and to adjust energies"

"... Second week. I am leading the warm ups; Patricia has been teaching us "on rope-movements" like running on the wall, jumps, flies, twists or suspensions;

Meanwhile my research is specifically concerned with the assessment of the advantages and limitations of dancing while connected to a rope; what kind of rope? Dynamic or elastic? What height from the floor? Which part of the body is the best to be clipped to the rope? Ways of interaction / contact with other aerialists ...

To answer these questions, I created a dance phrase and explored the same movements over and over; on the floor; on the wall; at floor level, twenty centimetres and three meters from the floor; with bungee rope or with "dynamic" climbing rope; clipped from the hips, from the chest and from the upper back. Through this exploration I assessed which movements were possible or not, while attached to a rope.

Every evening after being "roped figures" that sway, spin and drift through the space, we had feedback meetings and the next day planning. At the end of the day the best way to assess our progress was to watch the videos of the rehearsals and have a resolute evaluation of the day. Timing and safety were recurrent issues to talk about.

#### ***How "the miracle of Laoviah" was created***

Throughout this technical training the idea of "the miracle" was taking shape. Who was involved, what were the scenes we wanted to shoot, how and when they were going to be shot. I designed a shooting plan, including aerial system, costumes, music, storyboard, rehearsal schedule and filming deadlines.

As the artistic director of the project, I learnt a lot, including management skills. More than ten people were involved, including

children, elderly, disabled, dancers and people who had never danced before as well as the technicians, all of them connected together around "that miracle". The miracle itself was that Angel did fly, from that moment we started shooting the actual scenes which would make up the performance:

- the apparition of the Milagrosa Virgin abseiling down;
- Angel and his wife Delia dancing a tango as shadows with a wheel chair;
- the most emotional scene was as angel Laoviah came to help Patricia and send the old couple into the air;
- the wildest scene, entitled the "indigenous party", pictures Nico "the clown" juggling on bungee ropes five meters from the floor while eight other people dance on the air and on the floor;
- the nostalgic scene where Angel dreams of his youth and dances an aerial tango with his young wife.
- "the soul of the miracle" is the scene in which I used as stimuli the most intense emotions flourishing: Nostalgia, anguish, sadness as well as Angel's frustration towards his inability to move. From the technical point of view, this scene also felt important to me as it relied on a new system of rope control which Iñaki designed. This involved skilful communication between technician and performers. From the choreographic point of view this scene was the climax.

### ***Evaluation and Conclusion***

On the personal level the whole of the stay will remain an unforgettable experience. Completing the project, did feel like a miracle to me! However I realised that many technical requirements, like the structure and rigging possibilities, the dependence of equipment and technicians and the safety issues, had to be taken into account for our miracle to happen. I was not only able to learn new skills in the aerial field, but also gained much confidence in my choreographic ability to explore movement in ways I could never have imagined before.

One of the highlights during the rehearsals was working with this elderly, disabled couple, while choreographing the shadow tango piece. Watching them work out the steps with their versatile daughter Patricia, defining the floor pattern, the wheel chair travelling and helping them remember the steps, were amazing moments. This very moving experience made me realise how understanding and flexible an artistic director needs to be.

While working with David, who had never danced before, I agreed to his suggestion to rehearse with a completely different music. Techno music was more familiar to him, the old "Malena" tango wasn't touching him. It worked! We attained the same result but more quickly and more pleasantly. As a choreographer I discovered this as a valuable method of creation.

My expectations to research aerial dance as well as my ambition to experiment as an artistic director, working with such a diverse group, were fully covered. Yet, what I learnt on the human level far outreached the artistic and professional skills I gained. Allowing people to work, connect and bond in a very harmonious and integrated way, all focused around my artistic vision was the most rewarding aspect of the residency.

This project was an exciting collaboration and built a strong professional and personal relationship between Patricia and myself. She is now setting up an aerial theatre association and we are planning another collaboration soon. As I am currently participating in ACT (International Theatre and Dance Schools festival in Bilbao, Spain), I intend to make a presentation of the project this week and I will definitely encourage other fellow artists to apply for the LUTSF funding. Finally, as a suggestion to future LUTSF awardees, I would fully recommend to be ready to accommodate the original project to circumstances... life runs with a very different pace in many places outside the UK!

I would like to thank LUTSF, Patricia from Laoviah, Iñaki Allorbe, Camille Litalien (HCC Head of Dance Department) and Mai Nguyen Tri for helping me.