

29th September 2015

Dear LUTSF Secretary, Trustees, Patrons and Committee Members,

I would like to thank you for the scholarship which enabled me to travel to Findhorn on the 8th-15th August 2015 to participate in a research week with US choreographer Deborah Hay towards developing her new work *Figure a Sea*.

That was a memorable experience from many aspects and I feel I acquired useful knowledge which will enhance significantly my artistic practice and professional development. It was a unique opportunity for me to participate in Deborah Hay's choreographic process, engage with her performance practice within an evolving work, work in a group piece for 21 performers with dance practitioners of various background and experiences, and deal with questions related to my own work.

The residency took place in a beautiful eco-village next to the village of Findhorn, an environment which absolutely suits Hay's work and created a fruitful ground for inspiring conversations to unfold.

Having had the chance after that week to apply some of my findings to my practice, I look forward to discovering more on how the information I received during this period will be processed, built into my interests and integrated into my work.

Please find enclosed my report reflecting my experience. Thank you once more for your support which took me to this wonderful opportunity in Findhorn.

Yours sincerely,

Evangelia Kolyra

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Report

by Evangelia Kolyra

Description of the project

In August 2015 Independent Dance (ID), an organisation which presents a year-round programme of high-level professional development, organised a project with renowned US choreographer Deborah Hay in which I was

invited to participate after having worked with Hay for a week in September 2014. I travelled to Findhorn 8th-15th August for a research week towards developing Hay's newly commissioned by Cullberg Ballet work for 21 performers, titled *Figure a Sea*.

The sessions were structured in a way that myself and the 20 other dance artists could at first practice the questions that Hay proposed and then pass on to working on the choreography. One evening there was a screening of Becky Edmunds' film *Turn Your F^* Head*, who captured Deborah Hay's Solo *Performance Commissioning Project* in 2012. Throughout the day there were numerous fascinating conversations taking place between the participants.

Personal reflection on Deborah Hay's practice

Working with Deborah Hay is almost like having an insight of the history of the generations of dance she went through. Since there are a lot written about Hay's work, I would like to use this report only to offer my personal response to working with her.

Hay fully respects the performer and this becomes immediately obvious through the way she developed her practice, offering generously all the freedom to the performer. She provides tools that can be used to practice performance on a daily basis. Having the opportunity to work once more with her, gave me a deeper understanding of her philosophy and method of entering a performance state.



Photo by Evangelia Kolyra

I strongly resonate with Hay's practice. The way she uses language and keeps it in the forefront of the attention fascinates me. It keeps me engaged and interested, taking me simultaneously inside and outside of myself. The offered instructions, being somehow ungraspable, have the power to bring the performer to a state of performance by obliging them to focus on themselves through a

strong connection with the possibilities provided by the each time space and environment. While practicing with the proposed questions, it feels that the impossible becomes possible. It is discovering one's self by diving into the unknown.

Somehow Hay's practice solves my problem of needing to know and needing to be aware, and that of self-critic and self-consciousness. Focusing on almost philosophical directives, criticism disappears in a magical way and I found myself in an 'everything is valid and not valid' state, being fully aware of this contradiction. Her approach to performance renders the performer open to invite and use all the information available, and by integrating this large amount of information to cultivate a high level of consciousness. Keeping the mind busy with her indications reveals another layer in the thinking body, allows it to be fully aware without having to think about being so and evokes questions that I (the performer) am already dealing with at the time. The almost poetic I would say use of language, opens the doorway that takes the performer back to themselves and makes them purely present, observable and approachable by an audience. This inspirational and highly appreciated philosopher choreographer has a very robust philosophic concept which I feel it reaches the area of neuroscience.

Being with other dance practitioners

That trip was an excellent opportunity to broaden my horizons both professionally and personally by meeting, dancing and spending time with a number of dance practitioners of varied international background and experience. Being in the studio with experienced performers informed my movement and helped me to understand the full potential of this practice.

Furthermore, we had exciting conversations not only about Deborah Hay's work but also in relation to improvisation practices, community work, working with children, rural activity and touring, funding opportunities, working as choreographer, choreographic practices and travelling.



Photo by Siriol Joyner

I would like to emphasise here the importance of meeting with other choreographers. Working as an independent choreographer can be quite a lonely process even if there is a team of collaborators. To be amongst other choreographers, except for offering a supportive feeling, it also allows some essential matters choreographers deal with to come to the surface and reveals ways of how different people approach their creative and professional development. The conversations I had with some of the participants who

make choreographic work concerned creative practices and how these can be developed, how to approach the industry and how to work with collaborators. Many of us also agreed on the importance of being away from the basis when creating work.

This brought us to the significance of travelling. To be in the nature, away from activities linked to a big city, gave us a sense of freedom as well as allowed us to relax and reflect. Acquiring new experiences through changing environment and meeting other dance artists, influences the development of dance as a performing art. This is an essential time that boosts creativity and I realised that I should include more of this quality time in my way of living and as part of my creative development.



Photo by Nathalie Clouet

It was also encouraging for me to see that in an area such as Findhorn there is a vibrant community which organises artistic and other activities. There is a remarkable degree of difficulty in leaving in a rural area as an artist and still managing to create work and promote cultural events. Talking about rural activity and touring, we seemed to agree that this kind of initiatives, with the

appropriate encouragement and support, can thrive and engage more audiences. People in these areas are keen to see art and performance work. In the screening of the film *Turn Your F^* Head*, the audience was excited to have seen it and happy to talk with Hay and us who were working with her on that week, even if they did not have much dance experience.

Talking about financial support, a subject that was raised was that there are not many funding opportunities which support dance artists to attend short professional development courses and workshops, which would be extremely helpful for independent dance practitioners who want to expand the spectrum of creativity in their work. An important reason of my willingness to attend this research week was that opportunities for developing performance skills in the dance field are rare and this practice does not seem to be part of vocational dance training yet. To have more possibilities towards acquiring a spherical knowledge on other areas would be most inspiring.

Bringing this experience to my own practice

I will keep practicing with Deborah Hay's suggestions so that I can evolve as a performer and also transmit some of this experience to the dancers I work with as choreographer, with the aim to achieve making engaging and high quality work.

This week offered me an insight to Hay's choreographic process. Although I follow a different approach in making choreography, I embrace the notion that choreography emerges from practice and pay attention to the importance of the performance as I believe that a work can take various meanings depending on the dancers' performance.

I became particularly aware of the importance of words as a tool with which a director can pass information to their collaborators. Hay brings new layers in the art of performance and choreography through the use of language. In that manner she generates a specific idea or sense of something she would like to see without describing an action. The phraseology she employs is so alive and imaginative that allows the mover to enter this territory without judgement.

Hay sees the body as a container of thought and I see the body as a container of ideas. I feel there is a similarity there that I would like to explore further. She awakes awareness and directs the performer's attention through the adaptation of the score but I am also interested in offering this experience to the audience.

Overall, this trip to Findhorn was of great significance for my creative practice and development as performer and choreographer and offered inspiration upon which I can draw in my future projects.



Photo by Evangelia Kolyra