

Dear LUTSF

27th February 2007

Re: Assistance of the artistic director of Festland e.V., Steffen Tast, for the theatre production *Romeo and Juliet* in July 2006 (Klein Leppin/Germany)

Enclosed you can find my report of my work with Festland e.V. in July 2006. I'm very sorry for the delay of my response. As I already mentioned in my email I have not received any letters or emails, which I can partly explain with my moving house. I know that this still does not excuse sending my report so late. I have been looking at my diary and the only excuse I can offer is a very traumatic time in October; I spent that month ... and my professional life was effectively derailed for some time. I do apologise for the extreme lateness of this report and I hope you find it up to your expected standard. The work with Festland e.V. has given me great experience in leading a group of young people to a performance of high artistic standard. It was very helpful for my future work to witness the work of someone as experienced as Steffen Tast and I feel now much more confident to lead a group by myself. It also opened up the possibility for me to work in the community sector alongside my work with professionals. This will enrich my work as a choreographer and workshop leader and will also give me further future employment possibilities. Since the project in July 2006 I have been leading several community dance projects in Germany and England and I am very excited to have been invited to the next project of Festland e.V. in July 2007. Thank you very much for your part in presenting these opportunities to me.

The highlights of the project were, against any expectations, not the performances at the end, but the small moments experienced during the working process. It was beautiful to see how the young people benefited from the creative work, how they could find strengths they never thought of and how these people from deprived backgrounds gained in confidence and social skills.

I can highly recommended to all artists to work abroad, gain new experiences from other cultures and working contexts. It broadens the artistic view and challenges opinions about the own work and creative approach. For future awardees assisting someone's work I would suggest to keep an open attitude to all the different work including the process and to try to take on as much responsibility as the work allows. The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund offers a great opportunity every artist should try to take advantage of to explore and develop his artistic work.

Report:

Description of my work with Festland e.V. in July 2006

Festland e.V. is an organisation founded in 2001 by Christina Tast, which works with socially disadvantaged young people. Tast, an event manager for cultural activities, organises regular events in Klein Leppin, a small village in Brandenburg 200 miles outside Berlin, and invites participants from the surrounding region. Her husband Steffen Tast is a violinist with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and he works as the artistic director for the Festland projects. Depending on the kind of work planned, they invite theatre directors, opera singers, visual artists or choreographers to work with pupils from the village school and everyone in the village aged 3-80+. These projects provide the community in Klein Leppin and its surrounding areas with an opportunity to

experience creative and artistic processes at first hand; it is entertaining and educational and strengthens community bonds. For some individuals this experience provides long-lasting and positive social and personal changes.

Over the years Festland e.V. has developed into a professional organisation, providing contemporary dance experiences for even greater numbers of mixed-age group people. As a result of their successful work they now receive funding from private and public institutions and their collaborative working relationship to the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra is since 2005 officially part of the orchestra's educational program.

In July 2006 I was invited to assist the artistic director Steffen Tast for their new project, a theatre production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which also included different dance scenes. This project was in collaboration with the secondary school, Gesamtschule Gloewen and the Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin and furthermore involved actors and a choir, as well as the dancers. Festland e.V. invited a theatre director and two professional singers, as well as professional musicians to contribute to the project. Throughout the year they came to the school, holding workshops and creating different sections of the work.

In July 2006 I was assisting Steffen Tast in leading a workshop for forty pupils age fourteen at the Gesamtschule Gloewen. This workshop was about introducing contemporary dance and specific classical music pieces by Ravel, Gluck and Bernstein chosen for this theatre production, and creating different dance scenes for the *Romeo and Juliet* performance to this music. Apart from the creative demand to make dance scenes for forty children there was also a pedagogic challenge. This secondary school is the school for the children from the different villages in the area. In the school are many socially disadvantaged pupils with difficult family backgrounds due to the economic problems of this part of Eastern Germany since the German Reunion (October 1990). The percentage of unemployment and alcohol addiction is high amongst adults and many pupils are not getting the necessary attention from their parents.

Experiences

Leading this workshop together with Steffen Tast gave me a great insight into all the aspects of working creatively with young people. It was a fantastic opportunity to witness someone who is as experienced as Steffen Tast and to learn so much by working together with him. Steffen Tast lead both the music and dance workshops; my role was to assist throughout, leading some sessions, and specifically to make my choreographic skills and dance knowledge available to the group. This developed my musical understanding and how to incorporate it into my creative dance classes. But mainly I gained knowledge on the pedagogic skills when working with young people. After every workshop day we evaluate the day and exchanged our ideas and observations. These daily evaluation sessions helped me to become more sensitive to different pedagogic aspects of the work and made me more confident for future dance projects with young people. Here are a few examples:

I was very impressed with how all the children worked, with their sustained levels of concentration, and their involvement in the creative process. I was particularly struck by the great commitment given to the rehearsal work by children with otherwise poor attention in everyday schooling and by those regarded as 'difficult pupils' with (often quite severe) behavioural problems. I realised that this workshop gave them the

opportunity to show different strengths and gave the academically weaker pupils the chance to shine and succeed in the creative and physical tasks.

The pupils also got to know each other better and the teamwork provided valuable bonding experiences and generally strengthened the group feeling of the class. A high degree of physical contact, for example used in lifts, developed mutual trust and feelings of responsibility for each other. Even at the age of fourteen, girls and boys were working together with a strong focus on the work. In other activities, concerned with more conventionally academic subjects, they would become disrupted by adolescent insecurities or disruptive behaviour, whilst during the more physically directed workshop, there was only a pervading and attentive engagement. Throughout the workshop, as well as the development of their physical skills and coordination, the children's ability to remain focussed on one task improved.



At the beginning of the workshop session we set specific behavioural rules such as respect for one another, focus and pushing oneself to an unknown territory. By repeating these instructions, we created a system of rules, which guided the children. Trying something new can cause a feeling of insecurity and therefore can lead to disruptive behaviour. To avoid this it is important that an atmosphere is created where everyone feels safe and free to step into the unknown field. I have learnt that a structure with rules for the whole group can

help to give this security and support.

For the creative work it was important to split the class of 40 pupils into groups of 10-15. The attention is higher in smaller groups and quieter children find it easier to contribute to the working process. Also it was necessary to have alternative activities prepared for those who were unable to concentrate for the five hours session. Sometimes socially disadvantaged children, who have not had a continuous and constant education, can find it very difficult to concentrate over a longer period. Their attention level can sometimes only last for one hour and then they start looking for another stimulus. In the same time as it is frustrating for them this behaviour can be disruptive for the other children and the class work. Therefore it is important to have an alternative activity available, which these children can do whilst the rest of the group can carry on working without disruption. To make sure that doing the alternative activity is not a form of punishment it is important that it is related to the workshop activity, for example making props or costumes so that the children still feel included in the overall working process. I realised during this work just how important it is to communicate well with the other teachers, and learning assistants in general. I found at the Gesamtschule Gloewen that the teachers needed to be clear about our way of working, our creative and teaching aims and especially their role in the working process. In this workshop their role was more about observing and supporting smaller groups in their independent work and did not have a disciplinary function within the class. We wanted to use our advantage - that we did not know the children - and could meet them very openly and without any



preconceptions. Also we did not want to make any compromises in the way of how we would lead the class. This could give the pupils the chance to act differently and try out new roles within the working process. Meetings before the workshop and an evaluation afterwards were necessary for the teachers to prepare the pupils and integrate the workshop into a longer learning process. I realised that both the visiting dance artist and the teacher, have to acknowledge each other's expertise and it should be clear who

is responsible for what within the creative process.

Conclusion

I am very happy that I had the chance to work on this project with Festland e.V. and that I gained more experiences of working with young people. I'm feeling very honoured to have been given the chance to assist Steffen Tast and to learn from his experiences of leading a group of young people and developing their creative skills. This makes me feel more confident to take on future educational work and I want to run more projects with young people besides my work with professional dancers.

Steffen Tast and Festland e.V. have been very happy with my work. They have already invited me to take part in their 2007 project in July, this time as the autonomous leader for the dance workshops.

I found it very rewarding to witness the social and emotional affect the workshop and performance had on the children. Their self-esteem grew, their social skills developed and it was beautiful how they enjoyed and appreciated the creative work. At the end of the workshop week one boy came up to me and told me that this week had been the best one at school for him. He found a new friend and for the first time at school he felt like somebody believed in him. How rewarding creative dance with young people can be!

