

From: ROB LESSELS
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CAMBRIDGE CS4 2RN

17 DECEMBER 2002

Dear LUTSF Secretary,
Please find enclosed two copies of my report re: funding from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.
EVENT: BATTLE OF THE YEAR 2002
DATES: 26 OCTOBER 2002
VENUE: VOLKSWAGENHALLE - EUROPAPLATZ 1

Overall the trip was very successful and enjoyable from my point of view. I made contacts which led to a further trip abroad to an event in Los Angeles at the end of November, and using contacts made at both events I am planning a residential workshop week for next year which will benefit both the youngsters I teach, myself and others in my position from around the UK.

It was also a useful benchmarking process with regards to standards and styles of dance in other countries. The experience has broadened my understanding of a dance form I have been actively involved for the past ten years. The only advice I could give to anyone interested in similar events is to choose a smaller event, and if possible try to make contact with local practitioners by email before you travel. This will make it easier to gain useful contacts. Finally, I would like to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for providing me with this opportunity, it is very much appreciated and I feel, very much worthwhile also.

Your sincerely,

R. Lessels

Robert Lessels LUTSF Report re: Battle of the Year
October 26 2002, Braunschweig, Germany

The first half-day of the event was given over entirely to the conference, which gave attendees the opportunity to discuss their artform with leading figures in the genre. This was also the most ideal opportunity over the day to network with artists from other countries.

The conference itself was somewhat confusing, as it was being held in both German and English simultaneously. The content of discussion tended to vary mostly between petty disputes about cultural definitions and highly political debate, neither of which seemed to have much to do with the supposed focus of the event which was the dance form itself. I decided it was best to use the opportunity to network, checking the progress of the debate periodically. I found the atmosphere friendly and it was relatively easy to engage in conversation with complete strangers, as long as they spoke English! The biggest problem was choosing who to approach, the enormity of the event was a little overwhelming at times. I bumped into a few familiar faces, some of whom introduced me to a few unfamiliar ones, and generally kept an eye out for the more prominent figures within the culture.

The actual event itself (choreographed pieces and competition) was ridiculously crowded, I would estimate between 5 and 8 thousand people attended! A friend of mine who had also made the trip, had acquired a backstage pass so at this point I handed networking duties over to him. Probably the most beneficial part of the event from a dance perspective was the choreographed performances, which are compulsory for those entering the competition. Thirteen different groups from around the world performed. I was particularly impressed with the choreography of two groups-one based in Paris (Vagabonds) and the other Miami (Ground Zero). The French were particularly adept at mixing dance forms and their set was highly choreographed, the Americans of the other hand were more creative with their actual techniques, though I fear the intricate nature of their dance style was lost on many in the crowd.

Generally, the performances showed an impressive mix of styles and opened up new possibilities with regards to my own choreography. All that remained was for the judges to choose the four crews who would battle it out, move for move, for 1st, 2nd place and 3rd, 4th.

Battles work by placing the two groups face to face on stage and over a predetermined time limit they take it in turns to dance either individually or using routines, each trying to out do the last. Battles are judged on a combination of factors: Use of foundation/basic technique, use of advanced technique moves, flow, use of and adapting to the music, and originality either with regards to combinations or new moves unique to a particular dancer or crew. The 3rd, 4th place battle was between the Russians and the Swiss, I'm sorry to say it was lacklustre and I was disappointed not to see the Americans in there. The battle for first place saw the French fight it out against the Koreans, this was much more satisfactory.

Since returning from the event I have been able to adapt ideas from the performances into my own choreography for a theatre performance here in Cambridge. Creatively it has opened up new opportunities for myself, and I would hope also for those I work with on a regular basis. More significantly through contacts I made in Germany I was recently invited to a similar, but thankfully much smaller event in Los Angeles. Networking at both of these events has enabled me, along with colleagues, to begin planning an event of our own this coming Easter. Our event will be a workshop, as opposed to competition based drawing on world class talent from France and America. These classes will be primarily aimed at both the youth I am currently working with who are at an advanced level, and other artists in the UK whom I work with on a professional (performance) level. Although the event was based around the competition aspect, I feel it was actually dominated by the choreographed performances. I have to be honest by saying the conference was a waste of time, straying away from the focus of discussion too easily and never getting back to it! It was, however, a fantastic opportunity to network and exchange ideas on a one-to-one level with my contemporaries. It was an enjoyable and beneficial experience, the biggest drawback being its popularity. In conclusion, I would favour the smaller American events purely for the reason that it is much less effort to network whilst maintaining the quality of dance. The only drawback with the stateside events is the general lack of choreographed pieces.

Neither of these trips would have been possible without the support of LUTSF, and I am already reaping the benefits of this experience as I hope is made clear in my report.