

Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund,

9/2/2015

To whom it may concern at LUTSF,

Attached is my final report of my work in Florida on 'The History House, New Smyrna' project. This residency has been an essential stepping stone in my development as an emerging choreographer and performer. As well as opening my eyes to the potential that flamenco has as an evolving art form, I have come away with numerous invaluable tools and skills that I am excited to continue exploring and developing in the studio. Also, thanks to the video footage I have collected from this project I will now be able to apply to other residencies.

As well as being an inspiring process that pushed me beyond my own limits, working with Ms Marquez provided me with a deeper understanding of how I work as a choreographer and how to continue investigating my own creative process. Ms Marquez has agreed to direct my solo piece that I was developing whilst on the residency which we intend to present this coming year.

This trip has been such an expansive experience and I am so very grateful to the Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund for making it possible! Contemporary flamenco is in its early stages of development and so there aren't many choreographers available who have experience in the form. This makes it even more important to be able to travel, in order to have access to new information and keep communication between those who are innovating and exploring.

Many thanks again!

Yours faithfully,

Noemí Luz

Final Report – 'The History House, New Smyrna' directed by Niurca Marquez

Background

I am an English flamenco dancer and choreographer trained in Seville, Spain. I met Ms Marquez in Barcelona in 2009 at a festival of experimental flamenco where we started to discuss how cultural memory affects our personal and artistic narratives. The idea for The History house was born and Ms Marquez subsequently started to develop the project in Miami, Florida.

This last Autumn she obtained a four month residency in a town called New Smyrna Beach with Atlantic Center for the Arts. She was employed as their community artist in residence, with the intention of creating a performative installation that was to take place in a 100-year old house and that reflected the surrounding community. I was invited to participate and travelled to Florida in Autumn of 2014 for two months. Parallel to this project I was also given the opportunity to work on my own piece, having the time and space to be able to develop my own choreography.

Choreographic Process

Flamenco as an art form is quite young, having only just started to define itself and take form at the start of the 20th century. The majority of the Flamenco choreographers that are starting to experiment within the form have quite an old fashioned approach to process in comparison with choreographers working in Contemporary dance. Ms Marquez on the other hand has worked with choreographers such as Liz Learman, Victoria Marks and Wally Cardona and has spent many years experimenting with process and finding her own way of working. Having the experience of working on this project with her was a brilliant opportunity for me to have exposure to some new techniques, tools and strategies away from the conventional methods used in flamenco.

The piece was to be centred around the nature of cultural memory, how memory morphs over time and gets embellished or forgotten. Arriving in New Smyrna my knee jerk reaction was to get straight into studio and start creating. But Ms Marquez gently explained that before any choreographing happened it was essential for me to start researching and understanding the community of the town. Only then could the work to be a genuine reflection of the people and their stories.

Research took various forms. Ms Marquez interviewed members of the community, we went to both a Gospel and a Harmonica Festival and we rifled through Antique Shops as well as visiting the town's main landmarks and museum. What we discovered was not what Ms Marquez had expected. It seemed that the town didn't really have any solid identity as a community. Many of its residents were from the North and had retired to Florida and so these people hadn't grown up in the town. Over history the town seemed to have undergone endless cycles of having been destroyed for some reason or another and then rebuilt. This constant renovation meant a lack of local tradition and character. There was a general sensation that the town was dying, crumbling and fading and this became an ongoing theme as the piece was created.

The themes that became subject for the work were:

- The town had been founded as a result of one of the largest attempts at colonization. Endentured servants had been brought over from both Greece and Spain and endured horrifying conditions and maltreatment, yet nobody in the town knew about the Spaniards that came, and were under the impression that they had all been Greek.

-The town is divided by a railway track and that the black community still live on the west side, completely separate from the East side where the white people live. The railway had been an essential source of income for New Smyrna employing both blacks and whites. A strike years back had devastated the town's economy and many people had left and some even committed suicide.

-No lynchings ever happened in New Smyrna, though Volusia county had the highest number of lynchings of any state. The Kloo Klucks Klan still exist and are active in the county today.

-The Miss New Smyrna Beach Pageant which had run in the 1950's.

-A constant cycle of death and rebirth and the passing of time.

Once we got in to the studio, Ms Marquez's process to start drawing material was as follows:

1. We created a movement sequence that was physically descriptive of a detail from our research.
2. We distilled one element of the phrase using techniques such as repetition and gradation .
3. We watched each others' sequences and then let movement from the other's sequence seep in to our own.
4. We used an A B A structure A- the full sequence, B- something else, A- important parts of the original sequence.
5. Improvisation revisiting and exploring material.

Throughout our whole process Ms Marquez stressed the importance of not letting conscious thought get in the way while creating. The ABA structure forced us not to get attached to movement just because it appealed to us aesthetically or intellectually, but made us trust our bodies to decide what was working and what wasn't. This though a great challenge to me proved to draw much more genuine and less contrived material.

As the choreography started to take form Ms Marquez refused to set any movement sequence in stone, instead encouraging a structured improvisation with a choreographic score. The intention and the 'Why' behind each section was more important than having a set sequence which might instead create a stale, unspontaneous effect.

This whole process really stretched and challenged me. Improvisation in traditional flamenco has a very set structure and code that both dancer and musicians understand and follow. In this new approach to improvisation I had less structure to grab on to, which forced me to be present in the moment, to really listen to the music and react to Ms Marquez and/or the people around me. Ironically this at the end of the day is what I have always wanted to achieve in my traditional dancing though I had not quite found an effective way of exploring it.



The piece was not a conventional dance performance. The idea of the installation was to enable the audience to physically occupy the same space as the performers and to be free to wander around and experience the events at their will as opposed to sitting in an auditorium and being physically stationary and separate from the action. They were forced to make choices about what they wanted to watch / interact with and at moments more than one thing was happening at the same time in different parts of the house. As well as dance, fine artist Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez created installations in some of the rooms and projected video art, composer Jose Luis Rodriguez created original music for the dance as

well as doing live composition upstairs and a local poet read some of his poems as we danced. The result was very effective and people flowed through the space with the help of a cleverly designed map. We decided not to put up written explanations next to the art work so as not to break people's state or dictate what they should be perceiving and instead encourage them to be curious and to explore.

Flamenco dancers create sound and rhythm as well as movement and using the form proved to be an effective way of expressing the sensations we were experiencing in the town, making issues heard as well as seen. The vibrations of our footwork would echo through the house creating an interesting

experience for people in other rooms as well as for those standing right next to us.

Towards the end of the installation Ms Marquez would appear dressed in a red train dress (used in traditional flamenco) with the names of all of the Spanish indentured servants pinned to the cloth. We would proceed to pin the names on members of the public. This action though simple was very



Train dress with names pinned on to it

powerful and the audience played an essential role, being truly integrated in what was happening.

I performed a solo in the piece which was based on the Miss New Smyrna Beauty Queen, exploring the overpowering 'Southern hospitality' (often found in overly friendly waitresses) and contrasting it with the dark secrets hidden beneath the false exterior. The piece took form around a piano and crossed the line between live art and dance. I explore the piano, delve inside it

and get possessed by it, find flamenco rhythms hidden within it and try to impress the audience as I play a piece of Ravel. This piece was different every performance as I again had to react to the people present and the moment, abandoning ideas and steps if necessary to stay in character and true to the intention behind my actions. Having never done anything of this nature this piece took me out of my comfort zone and made me question the line between dance and performance, one which I enjoyed crossing very much.

Parallel to the History House I had time to work on my own piece that I have been developing. The work is inspired by the idea of Jonah the belly of the whale and questions and explores my own Jewish roots. Ms Marquez mentored me as I developed the choreography, encouraging me to observe my own process, take note of the things that worked for me and those that didn't and to ask why. She pushed me to find honest movement and sacrifice that which I had chosen only for aesthetic effect. As flamenco dancers we spend so much time in front of a mirror correcting ourselves visually it becomes a habit and one hard to break. We are so worried about what we look like that we forget what it is we are trying to express which at the end of the day is the whole point. It was very hard for me to let go of this though and really get inside of the movement. Working in a studio without mirrors was a fundamental help with this and forced me to listen to my body as opposed to observing it from the exterior and in two dimensions. The result was a much freer, more dynamic and expressive movement quality. Observing video of my studio practice both from the beginning of the residency and from the end of it there is a colossal difference in the quality of my movement and it is coming from a completely different place.

Conclusion

Being involved in the History House has led me to question what it is that I want to create myself as a Flamenco choreographer and I have gained invaluable tools to help me to go about it. It has also demonstrated the world of unexplored possibilities flamenco has. My perception of community work has shifted, and my eyes have been opened to the many different ways one can use dance to access, involve and inspire a community without being limited to solely leading workshops and classes. It has demonstrated the effectiveness of taking dance performance out of the theatre and made me speculate on the many ways of integrating audiences and using them as active participants in a performance.

On returning from the residency I have commenced rehearsals with my company. Dotdotdot Dance is a collaboration with two other dancer/choreographers and we use traditional flamenco as a medium to draw from and create dance. I have been using some of the tools in the studio which are already making a dramatic impact on our existing show 'No Frills'. Whilst on the residency I also came up with a concept for a new show for the company which we aim to create this year. This will be a golden opportunity to continue to experiment with the choreographic tools I have been exploring and also to investigate how the three of us work together in collaboration and which methods suit us best. I am keen to continue expanding my horizons and will be applying to other residencies. Thanks to this project I now have enough video footage of my work in order to apply. I also aim to present my own piece within the next six months and Ms Marquez has agreed to direct it.