

Report to LUTSF from Cath Hawkins:

I returned from the travels that the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund supported on the 8th February 2004 and am therefore supplying a report about my experience. I left Manchester on the 4th January 2004 for Plainfield in Western Massachusetts to attend a three-week training course for continuing development in Contact Improvisation with Nancy Stark Smith. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January I travelled to New York City and spent two weeks attending classes at the Susan Klein/Barbara Mahler School of Dance and Movement Studies.

I had previously attended the three-week course and other training opportunities with Nancy Stark Smith and rightly anticipated that this further experience would provide a valuable resource for my work as a dance artist. I also wished to learn more about Klein technique. I feel that in two weeks I had a further introduction to this detailed body of work developed by Susan Klein and Barbara Mahler and the time to gather practical understanding of my own body.

Highlights in my travels include two dramatic falls in lots of snow. One was a short study I was encouraged to perform by Nancy Stark Smith for my fellow workshop participants, outside in freezing temperatures in the rural Berkshires. It was challenging and exciting to share a short movement experiment that involved running, jumping, falling and breaking eggs, watched through large windows from the warmth of inside by a bemused audience.

An unplanned fall happened, after a heavy snowfall on a sidewalk in NYC and left me with a temporary limp. Yet despite this I was over excited by the huge choice this big, loud, never ending city offered. I met, shared interests and dancing with many different people from all over the world and plan to see some of them again.

If I had a suggestion for future Awardees it would be to do as much research about where you are going and what you are doing as possible. Also save or generate (I was also supported by Arts Council England North West) a good amount of funding for your travels. I have found there does come a point in intensive training when you need to look after yourself or even have others do this so getting good insurance is a must.

I have already shared my travelling experience. Since returning from the USA I have continued working with 'So Many Words' Theatre Company, a disability arts organisation for young people based in Salford near Manchester. I share my practice of improvisation with this group of skilled and experienced performers. The artistic director Liz Taylor has observed how my recent training has already had an impact on the group especially in their confidence in and commitment to improvising in performance. I am also sharing my experiences with a group of North West based dance artists by being part of an improvisation project, initiated by Andrea Buckley currently taking place in Liverpool. This project will provide the opportunity to teach classes, take part in performances and explore openly, led and supported by the group. The project, supported by ACENW and PH Holt evolved from a group, again initiated by Andrea that have met to practice improvisation over the last year. There is a thriving community of dance artists within the North West who share an interest in Contact Improvisation. Therefore classes, workshops, training and conferences regularly take place and offer opportunities for sharing experiences.

I am now planning and organising the next phase of the site sensitive performance work that I have chosen to explore. I feel inspired with a new energy and have gained new ideas from my travels about how to move on with all that creating new work as an independent dance artist entails.

Many thanks for the award,

Cath Hawkins

#### 'CONTINUING' DEVELOPMENT IN CONTACT IMPROVISATION WITH NANCY STARK SMITH AND KLEIN TECHNIQUE.

On the first day of the Nancy Stark Smith three week training intensive, sitting on the heated floor of one of the beautiful Earthdance studios and looking out on a forest landscape covered in snow we, myself and twenty other participants were asked to consider and share our reasons for being there. Re-visiting this place after three years during which my work as a dance artist had changed I wished to take time to think about where and what it is now. 'small things' what I call my exploration of site sensitive performance felt like it partly began here during a time when I could really discover my creative interests. It then became a research and development project and last year was a larger performance project at The Lowry in Salford, Manchester and now I feel like developing it further. So this five weeks of moving, dancing, listening,

discussing, watching, trying, failing, agreeing and arguing were about making sure 'small things' is filled with my informed and varied interests.

Within Nancy's varied interests, and I think she does try to include them all in these three week intensives is an excellent place to nurture your own. She offers a rigorous physical training that includes Contact Improvisation. With Nancy one experiences this movement form in its historical context within the personal telling of its development. This happens in the studio and more informally. Then there is the practice of all her other interests and their history. These include' in no specific order and in what she describes as her holographic style of teaching they appear and disappear in what seems a specific and un-specific way; Improvisation, the Underscore, Composition, States, Elements, Listening, Contemplative Practice and Come As You Are.

Notes that I made during these three weeks are uncharacteristically messy for me. There is time at Earthdance, which is an isolated dance retreat where most of those doing the workshop live, eat, sleep and dance within the same comfortable yet basic rooms. Time to make notes, discuss, read and reflect. My notes suggest the huge amount of information being given and how inspired I was to think an idea through, reflect on feedback and create a short performance study. I have a rich resource to carry into my next performance project that is not just in my notebook. I identified falling as an interest and did amuse others as I practised crash landing at every opportunity especially on the excellent mats of a local Akido Dojo.

Also my interest in studying and attempting the arrangement of objects seemed to work its way onto the course as Nancy acknowledged it on the final day and this is enriched by her ideas about Composition. During the three weeks there was also the opportunity to take part in Jams, informal sharings and focused discussion groups and a little time to enjoy this beautiful part of the USA. On the last night at Earthdance I was part of a discussion about what a 'continuing' workshop had been. What Nancy had taught we had experienced her teaching before. The Elements were Earth, Fire, Water, Air and Ether and we had again been given the background to this interest and then asked to take these as a starting point, improvise and consider what resulted. Yet this time I felt my practice richer, more complicated by an intricate pattern of what seemed familiar becoming unfamiliar. I am still engaged in examining and wearing this new pattern.

Apart from it being just as cold New York city was a huge contrast to Massachusetts. Yet I really enjoyed the experience of visiting the Klein studio, seeing performances at the beautiful St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery by K.J. Holmes, Bebe Miller and some interesting emerging artists and also visiting many museums, art galleries and tourist locations. I planned to attend Jams and a selection of classes to make the most of my time. Yet soon after attending an improvisation session with K.J. Holmes I slipped on the sidewalk and was left with a swelled and bruised leg. So I took a body feeling like it had been rigorously worked for three weeks, accessorised with a new limp to the Klein studio and really appreciated concentrating on the specific information given and my body.

I had been very intrigued by a short course in Klein technique I had attended a number of years ago. It had an un-expected beneficial effect on a deteriorating neck injury. I wondered, as I got to TriBeCa, rang the bell and looked up to receive the key that falls down to you so you can let yourself in if I would feel this effect again. I attended classes with mainly Barbara Mahler nearly every day for two weeks and after a few days noticed looking up was easier than it had been for years.

I feel I should direct any readers interested in a definition of Klein technique to the writings of Susan Klein and others on the website, [www.kleintechnique.com](http://www.kleintechnique.com) and also to a class which usually means following me to NYC.

I feel I have only just started experiencing a huge body of work about the body, the individual's body and its singular experience and therefore my description would not be very informed yet I know I want to do more. Klein technique offers me a vehicle for beneficial change and understanding on a body felt level. This change has already had an impact on my movement in dancing and teaching as my body seems to think more or I notice more its growing potential. I have just got started on including Klein technique in my movement practice and experiencing how it effects my work and therefore plan to attend the short courses Barbara Mahler will teach in Europe this year and to visit again NYC and the Klein studio in coming years. It will take me some time to digest all the experiences I had during this hugely challenging intensive. At present being creative within this 'small things' structure I have made is my predominant interest. The work of Nancy Stark Smith and Susan Klein/Barbara Mahler has supported and challenged the development of this.

Photos by Tiny Hettich

